Moved to Compassion: Envisioning Parables in the Gospel of Luke

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MOVED TO COMPASSION: ENVISIONING PARABLES IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

by

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School, Marquette University, in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Milwaukee, WI

May 2023
ABSTRACT
MOVED TO COMPASSION: ENVISIONING PARABLES IN THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Patrick J. O’Kernick, B.A., M.A.
Marquette University, 2023

The primary goal of modern parable studies seems to be objective, more or less impersonal, interpretations. The subjective experience of the reader, the ways in which real readers are active and personally engaged in their encounters with parable texts—these things have hardly been addressed. Moreover, narrow views of reception activity have yielded narrow views of the parables themselves. Why, after all, read a parable firsthand? This is the central concern of my study.

From reader response criticism, education-oriented reading research, cognitive psychology, and cognitive literary studies I derive what I call an Envisionment-Development Model of Reading (EDMR). According to EDMR, reading is the progressive formation (development) of a multimodal sense of the text (envisionment). The reader develops her envisionment through acts of comprehension, engagement, and various kinds of extratextual appropriation. She so manages her attention as to produce an envisionment that fulfills her goals, reading in different modes depending on her goals.

I detect in The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) what I term “measured disclosure.” I infer, then, that the parable is told for reception in an aesthetic mode. The reader seeks to realize in herself an expression of profundities she expects to find in the text, and this is to be enjoyable, life-enhancing, and conducive to her participation in community. If, as I argue, The Prodigal Son is so intended, then its purpose is expansive: to nurture the reader’s disposition toward Prodigal Son-like phenomena and to bring readers into community with one another and even the author.

I find ten parables in Luke to be further candidates for aesthetic reception and address the best of these, The Minas (19:12b-27). Having already set out the practice of aesthetic reception, I now invite my readers to join me in reimagining the text in conversation with EDMR and recount how the parable’s violent conclusion led me to consider atrocity studies, which turn out to shed new light on the parable. The Minas, I conclude, is fit for aesthetic reception but also will have had in cultural context a definite rhetorical force in the fate of the third slave.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Patrick J. O’Kernick, B.A., M.A.

First and foremost, I would like to thank my director, Julian V. Hills, who dedicated so much time and attention to this project. Over countless hours he has helped me to refine my ideas and bring them to expression. Moreover, his enthusiasm helped me to persevere.

I would like to thank the members of my committee, Deirdre A. Dempsey, Joshua Ezra Burns, and Michael B. Cover, for sharing their passion, kindness, and expertise throughout my time at Marquette.

I would like to thank Paul Danove, who set me on the path that led to this study and encouraged me throughout.

I would like to thank my parents, Joe and Della, for their constant, unhesitating support.

I would like to thank my wife, Jenn, for the inspiration she has given me, the time she has given me, and so much more besides.

And I would like to thank my son, Finn, whose contribution escapes words.
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INTRODUCTION

In his preface to *The Gospel in Parable*, John R. Donahue implores his readers to read the Bible, and not merely about the Bible: “My plea is that readers work with the Bible at hand. Whether readers agree with my suggestions is far less important than their own engagement with the biblical images and texts.” On the one hand, this statement is not at all remarkable: Donahue is acknowledging that the Bible is more important than his commentary—he is expressing humility. On the other hand, it raises the question: Why is the reader’s “own engagement with the biblical images and texts” important? Donahue does not say. The value of reading firsthand is simply presupposed.

Similarly, Donahue instructs preachers “[to] allow the parable to exercise its own power on the hearers.” Audience participation is essential:

The parable is a question waiting for an answer, an invitation waiting for a response. It does not really “exist” or function until it is freely appropriated. Theologically this means that the parable is a form of discourse that appeals not only to the fascination of the human imagination with metaphor, or to the joyous perception of a surprise or paradox, but to the most basic of human qualities: freedom. Jesus chose a form of discourse that appealed to human freedom.

Donahue concludes by casting the reader/hearer in the image of Jacob wrestling:

Perhaps the best “application” in proclaiming the parables is to help people to be so captured by a biblical text that they will wonder what it really means and will wrestle with it. Like Jacob (Gen. 32:22-32), in the struggle they may even be touched by God’s power and presence.

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2 Ibid., 13.

3 Ibid., 19.

4 Ibid., 216.
But what does it mean for a parable to “exercise its own power,” or to say that a parable “does not really ‘exist’ or function until it is freely appropriated”; come to that, what does it mean to be “captured” by or “wrestle” with a text?

Along the same lines, in *Reimagine the World: An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* Bernard Brandon Scott describes readers as “co-authors” of the text:

We often view reading as entering the author’s mind. We imagine we are engaging in conversation with the author. But the author is absent and silent. When we read, we bring the story to life. We become in some sense a co-author of the text. The conversation takes place in our brain. The text is just letters, silent letters, until we read those letters and give them voice, life, imagination.5

But what sorts of things are entailed in this co-authoring, in this giving of voice, life and imagination?

Finally, Richard Lischer, in *Reading the Parables*, again presents firsthand encounter with the parables as indispensable.6 He characterizes reading as “the primal interaction with a written document.” “Reading begins,” he claims, “with listening carefully to the text and allowing oneself to be perplexed by it. Reading comes in a flood of perceptions, including mixed and simultaneous messages, as well as echoes from other literature and from one’s own experience.”7 According to Lischer the reader is “the second maker of a parable … who makes the internal assessments necessary to engage

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7 Ibid., 2.
the story, allows it to speak, and makes a new home for it in the soul and the community.\footnote{Ibid., 3.}

Making a new home in the soul is certainly evocative, but what in plain terms does it mean? The ways that Donahue, Scott, and Lischer characterize reading—not without warrant, the unsympathetic reader is likely to find these platitudinous, romantic, or at least vague.

What does it mean, then, to read? And why exactly might it be of singular importance to read a parable firsthand? At first blush, I admit, these questions might seem tedious. But this very impression is telling. It arises from a default sense that everyone knows what reading is and everyone knows why reading something for yourself is important. However, the notion that we already know surely suggests the need for critical investigation. Because if reading is as decisive for parables as Donahue, Scott, and Lischer make it seem, then a better understanding of reading is likely to make possible a better understanding of parable. Indeed, the guiding assumption of the present study is this: if a parable is a counterpart to a person reading, then a more critical and comprehensive vision of reading will lead to a more complete vision of parable.

I proceed in five chapters. In Chapter 1 I survey the field, necessarily in a limited manner. Modern parable studies began at the end of the nineteenth century with Adolf Jülicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu.\footnote{Jülicher, Die Gleichnisreden Jesu, 2 vols. [1886–98]; 2nd ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1899).} As is well known, Jülicher argues that Jesus’s parables were originally similes likening the kingdom of God to known realities so as to
teach general moral truths. These clear and simple parables, furthermore, have been obscured by allegory—that is, both the allegorical interpretations of Christians throughout history and the evangelists’ allegorical reworking of the parables. Jülicher thus tries to recover the parables of Jesus freed from later accretions, and this—more than his rejection of allegory or description of the parables as simple comparisons—is what makes his study of enduring significance. As Stephen I. Wright puts it:

The modern era of parable interpretation, of which Jülicher stands as the greatest representative, has cast off the entire framework of divine meaning…. The new era which Jülicher decisively—if not totally without precursors—ushers in is the era of seeking the intention of the man Jesus in the parables. But this is largely

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10 C. H. Dodd (1935) presents an abridged version of Augustine’s interpretation of The Good Samaritan (Quaestiones Evangeliorum, II, 19), a classic example of allegorical reading, (The Parables of the Kingdom, Fount paperback ed. [London: Collins, 1978], 13-14):

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho; Adam himself is meant; Jerusalem is the heavenly city of peace, from whose blessedness Adam fell; Jericho means the moon, and signifies our mortality, because it is born, waxes, wanes, and dies. Thieves are the devil and his angels. Who stripped him, namely, of his immortality; and beat him, by persuading him to sin; and left him half-dead, because in so far as man can understand and know God, he lives, but in so far as he is wasted and oppressed by sin, he is dead; he is therefore called half-dead. The priest and Levite who saw him and passed by, signify the priesthood and ministry of the Old Testament, which could profit nothing for salvation. Samaritan means Guardian, and therefore the Lord Himself is signified by this name. The binding of the wounds is the restraint of sin. Oil is the comfort of good hope; wine the exhortation to work with fervent spirit. The beast is the flesh in which He designed to come to us. The being set upon the beast is the belief in the incarnation of Christ. The inn is the Church, where travelers returning to their heavenly country are refreshed after pilgrimage. The morrow is after the resurrection of the Lord. The two pence are either the two precepts of love, or the promise of this life and of that which is to come. The innkeeper is the Apostle (Paul). The supererogatory payment is either his counsel of celibacy, or the fact that he worked with his own hands lest he should be a burden to any of the weaker brethren when the Gospel was new, though it was lawful for him ‘to live by the Gospel.’
hidden under the powerful rhetoric of Jülicher’s opposition between plain simile and obscure allegory.\footnote{Wright, The Voice of Jesus: Studies in the Interpretation of Six Gospel Parables, Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 132; emphasis added.}

Thus Jülicher began a discussion that has developed in myriad ways for well over a century.

In Chapter 1, I come to this discussion to discern how reception activity has been portrayed.\footnote{Thorough if not comprehensive introductions to modern parable studies include Craig L. Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 33-194; Ruben Zimmermann, Puzzling the Parables of Jesus: Methods and Interpretation (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015), 21-179. Jeffrey T. Tucker directs readers to twenty-four sources (!), claiming that “[these] would provide a comprehensive history of parable research covering nearly every major parable interpreter, the significant issues involved in parable interpretation, and the various interpretive methods applied to the parables” (Example Stories: Perspectives on Four Parables in the Gospel of Luke, JSNTSup 162 [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1998], 22 n. 14).} I ask, \textit{What do audiences do, according to parable studies?} I approach the field in terms of four theoretical camps: parable as \textit{situation-dependent argument}; parable as \textit{metaphor}; parable as \textit{allegory}; and parable as \textit{art}. In each of these, some notion of reception activity operative in the procedure affects the results. And yet the visions of what audiences do are commonly uncritical or partial, i.e., there is a relatively rigorous understanding of only a select aspect of reception activity. In sum, the modern study of parables is informed by various incomplete notions of reception activity.

In Chapter 2 I present a fresh, critical, comprehensive vision of reception activity, what I shall refer to as an Envisionment-Development Model of Reading (EDMR). In constructing this model, I have drawn from reader response criticism, education-oriented reading research, cognitive psychology, and cognitive literary studies. In EDMR I
combine conceptions from these various disciplines into a unified vision of reading serviceable in parable studies but also in biblical studies generally.

EDMR invites the investigator to see reading as the progressive formation (development) of a multimodal sense of the text (envisionment). The reader develops her envisionment through acts of comprehension, engagement, and various kinds of extratextual appropriation. Moreover, she so manages her energy and attention as to produce an envisionment that fulfills her goals. In other words, the reader reads in different modes depending on her goals. EDMR is thus a reasonably comprehensive model of reading that makes it possible to articulate claims about the experience of reading in a critically rigorous manner.

In Chapters 3-5, I return to parables with EDMR in hand. Chapters 3 and 4 comprise a two-part argument concerning The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). In Chapter 3 I argue that a quality of measured disclosure is detectable in it. I claim that there are grounds in the text for diverse, story-defining inferences. To support this, from studies of the parable I compile a list of divergent evaluative construals of segments of the text, e.g., that in 15:12 the father shows patience/love when he complies with the younger son’s request, or alternatively, that the father is foolish to comply. In The Prodigal Son I find that there are five occasions for story-defining mutually exclusive construals. I infer from this that The Prodigal Son is not intended to communicate or do one definite thing, whether rhetorically, metaphorically, or allegorically. Rather, The Prodigal Son is intended for aesthetic reception, a proposal I develop in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 4, I employ EDMR to describe an aesthetic mode of reading (or potentially hearing) and propose that The Prodigal Son is an aesthetic counterpart, that is,
the discursive counterpart to a person reading in an aesthetic mode. In an aesthetic reading mode, I propose, the reader earnestly intends to realize in herself profundities she expects to find in the text, as she anticipates this is to be enjoyable, life-enhancing, and conducive to her participation in a community. To pursue this intention, the reader gradually maximizes her envisionment standards so that she works more and more to engage the parable in encounter after encounter. As an aesthetic counterpart, The Prodigal Son is heard or read as life- and community-enhancing; as an occasion to develop the reader’s disposition toward Prodigal Son-like phenomena; as a locus of community. I present four fictional vignettes to illustrate something of the process of reading The Prodigal Son in an aesthetic mode.

If it is plausible that The Prodigal Son is an aesthetic counterpart, this raises the possibility that other parables may be approached similarly. A survey of the parables in Luke yields what I consider to be ten candidates, the next best being The Minas (19:12b-27). In Chapter 5, then, I read The Minas as an aesthetic counterpart, now drawing from my own experiences reading the parable in an aesthetic mode. Though the difficult conclusion, in which the king orders that his enemies be brought before him and slaughtered (19:27), initially presents an impasse—leaving me at a loss, unable to engage the text further—it eventually prompts me to learn about real atrocities, ancient and modern. This enables me, first, to bring the terrible events suggested by the parable into a vivid imaginative consideration, and second, to establish a sense of the coherence of the parable in terms of a king manipulating his subordinates to perpetrate an atrocity. A recent study of the emotional lives of first-century Romans leads me to refine my envisionment of the parable still more: apparently, in cultural context the third slave is
thoroughly disgraced whether he supports the king or opposes him. Ultimately, I find that
The Minas does qualify as an aesthetic counterpart, but I also detect a more narrow
rhetorical purpose. I describe it, then, as a rhetorical-aesthetic counterpart.

EDMR thus newly empowers the investigator to hold in critical consideration the
reader’s encounter with a parable. To develop an envisionment of a text is to do much
more than to interpret it. And the reader’s envisionment of a text is something other and
more extensive than alleged meaning(s) of the text. Indeed, in what follows I do not write
of the meaning of a parable except when recounting the positions of others who use this
phraseology. By elucidating the experience of reading a parable, I hope to expand the
critical conversation beyond interpretation and meaning.
CHAPTER 1
WHAT AUDIENCES DO IN MODERN PARABLE STUDIES

Operative in every parable study is some notion of what audiences do, i.e., reception activity. The primary goal of this chapter is to identify the understandings of reception activity informing modern studies of the parables. Reception activity is frequently appealed to in a casual, noncritical way and some notions are problematic, or so I will argue. But most important is this: no study yet has been informed by an expansive vision of reception activity, one that is both relatively comprehensive and sensitive to the complexities of real-life reception events.

I begin by analyzing studies wherein historical audiences of the parables are of primary interest. Three figures serve to represent three theoretical camps:

1. Eta Linnemann (1961), who presents parables as arguments that bring the audience to a profound decision (1.1);

2. Bernard Brandon Scott (1989), who presents parables as metaphoric narratives that shatter the audience’s mythemes (1.2); and

3. Craig L. Blomberg (1990), who presents parables as allegories that communicate “points” to the audience (1.3).

I then turn to studies wherein modern-day audiences are of greater interest. The understandings of reception activity informing these studies tend to be more developed. I consider five figures under three heads:

1. G. V. Jones (1964) and Dan O. Via Jr. (1967), who present parables as works of literary art that have enduring human significance (2.1);

2. Susan Wittig (1977) and Mary Ann Tolbert (1979), who attempt to elucidate the alleged polyvalent form of the parables (2.2); and

3. Charles W. Hedrick (2004), who claims that parables are meaningful inasmuch as they “resonate” with different readers in different ways (2.3).
In a final, brief section (3), I consider the increasingly commonplace notion that parable reception entails engaging other receivers, other receptions.

I analyze each study in terms of its parable theory, i.e., its characterization of three things: Jesus’s career; what a parable is and does; and what audiences do. Furthermore, I examine each author’s treatment of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32) to see the practical consequences of the theoretical position.

Thus I will attempt to document the operative notions of reception activity; describe the spectrum of approaches adopted in modern parable studies; and introduce a variety of receptions of The Prodigal Son.

1.1 Parable as Situation-Dependent Argument

C. H. Dodd (The Parables of the Kingdom, 1935) and Joachim Jeremias (Die Gleichnisse Jesu, 1947) portray parables as situation-dependent arguments. In Jeremias’s words:

What we have to deal with is a conception which is essentially simple but involves far-reaching consequences. It is that the parables of Jesus are not—at any rate primarily—literary productions, nor is it their object to lay down general maxims [as Jülicher argued] … but each of them was uttered in an actual situation of the life of Jesus, at a particular and often unforeseen point. Moreover, as we shall see, they were mostly concerned with a situation of conflict—with justification, defense, attack, and even challenge. For the most part, though not exclusively, they are weapons of controversy. Every one of them calls for an answer on the spot.¹

In her Gleichnisse Jesu: Einführung und Auslegung (1961) Eta Linnemann likewise portrays parables as “weapons of controversy.” Additionally she characterizes parable as Sprachereignis (language event), following Ernst Fuchs. Parables are language

events in so much as discourse is employed to create a genuinely new possibility for the audience, a possibility which they must accept or reject.2

Linnemann’s parable theory is straightforward. Jesus will have been known to his audience as “a carpenter from Nazareth,” “a wandering Rabbi,” and “a preacher of repentance … whom some supposed to be a prophet.” The “arrival of the kingdom of God” is “the center of [Jesus’s] message.”3 Following Jülicher, Linnemann defines a parable proper as a freely composed story that

1. narrates an interesting particular case (in contrast to a similitude);
2. argues by means of correspondence (in contrast to an illustration or example); and
3. has a single point of comparison (in contrast to an allegory).4

Parables are arguments calculated to affect a specific audience on a specific occasion. In the context of a real-life conflict, Jesus tells a story that parallels the conflict. The parable “evokes the same or at least a similar attitude as the listeners have taken to the reality in question.” Since it is implied that the story corresponds to the reality, Jesus “opens up the

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2 Contrast may help to illuminate this idea. In originating the concept “language event,” Fuchs departs from Rudolf Bultmann, as Norman Perrin puts it (Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom: Symbol and Metaphor in New Testament Interpretation [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980 (1976)], 110):

Bultmann had tended to regard language as essentially a vehicle for transmitting an understanding of existence, as a means of conveying an “expression of life.” Fuchs, on the other hand, is concerned with what in English came to be called the “performative” aspect of language. He is concerned with language as “language event,” with the power of language to bring into being something that was not there before the words were spoken. So Fuchs understands the parables of Jesus as a “language event.” It is not that Jesus created new concepts, but rather that in the parables “Jesus’ understanding of his situation ‘enters language’ in a special way.”


4 Ibid., 3-8.
possibility of understanding [the reality] (anew).”

The audience is to recognize the correspondence between the story and the reality; to follow the story in a way anticipated by Jesus; and to accept or reject the new vision of the reality in question.

Regarding The Prodigal Son, Linnemann accepts the occasion Luke provides (15:1-2) as the likely historical setting: “This parable is the answer of Jesus to the protest of the Pharisees against his table fellowship with tax collectors and sinners.”

The parable is an argument directed at the Pharisees in just this situation. It is designed to offer them a new understanding of repentance—an understanding they must accept or reject. To interpret the parable, Linnemann imagines the Pharisees’ reactions to the progression of the story. As the story begins, the younger son’s request and the father’s compliance (15:11-13) do not strike the Pharisees as unusual or offensive: “Emigration was the order of the day.” The audience infers the son’s motives: “‘He wants to build himself a life abroad,’ think Jesus’ listeners.”

When the younger son falls into destitution by

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6 Ibid., 73. Studies of The Prodigal Son often accept Luke’s setting as historical, e.g., Dodd (Parables of the Kingdom, 90); Jeremias (Parables of Jesus, 131).

7 Linnemann, Parables of Jesus, 75. There is no consensus as to whether the younger son’s request and the father’s compliance were aberrant or normal at the time. Kenneth E. Bailey argues that the son’s request is tantamount to treating his father as if he were dead; that the father’s compliance will have been considered foolish or worse; and that the elder will have been judged negatively because he fails to intervene or even protest. The whole family offends their community (Poet and Peasant and Through Peasant Eyes: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables of Luke, combined ed. [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983], 161-65). On the other hand, from a review of the limited evidence available John S. Kloppenborg concludes that “there is no reason to suppose that the son’s request for a division of the property prior to his father’s death was especially unusual, or that it constituted an insult or death-wish” (“The Parable of the Prodigal Son and Deeds of Gift,” in Jesus, Paul and Early Christianity: Studies in Honour of Henk Jan de Jonge, ed. Rieuwerd Buitenwerf, Harm W. Hollander, and Johannes Tromp, NovTSup 130 [Leiden: Brill, 2008], 192).
squandering his bounty in dissolute living (15:13), some in the audience begin to recognize that he has a “loose and ungodly life” similar to the tax collectors and sinners.

By the time the younger son hires himself out to a non-Jew (rather than seeking help in a Jewish community) and goes to feed swine (rendering observance of his religion impossible) (15:15), the audience connects the fictional son to the real-life tax collectors and sinners.\(^8\) When the younger son longs for the carob pods, comes to himself, plans his return home and speaks to his father (15:16-21), it will not have been clear to the audience whether the boy is genuinely repentant. At the same time, the audience is torn as to how to react to the father’s reception of him: the father’s behavior is unexpected, but traditions of fatherly compassion render it intelligible and credible.\(^9\) Jesus presents the Pharisees with a new way of understanding repentance:

> Misery drives a man to realize that turning back is the only road left on which there is still something to hope for. His confession of guilt is answered by abundant mercy. No test of genuineness is demanded of him; in uttering his confession of guilt he is already received back as a son in his father’s house. Now if this turning back were repentance, could not a lost soul look confusingly like a penitent soul? If this were repentance…! Jesus must know the strict demands that were made of the penitent. He knows that he was expected to show very clearly in his life that something different had come of it, while at the same time there was no want of readiness to receive him fully into the community again when he had sufficiently proved himself. Jesus knows all this. If in spite of that he tells the story in this way, he obviously means to see repentance in the light of the story. Can he succeed in bringing his listeners to do so too? If it is possible to make such compassion credible in an earthly father, how much more can it be asserted of the heavenly father!\(^10\)

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\(^8\) Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus*, 75-76.

\(^9\) Ibid., 77.

\(^10\) Ibid., 77-78. According to Linnemann, characters in the parables act in realistic if sometimes surprising ways. Parables are arguments, not allegories. The audience is not to resort to interpreting the father as a figure of God to make sense of his incredible actions; rather, the audience is to accept the father’s actions as credible (if exceptional) in terms of human fatherhood—so, how much greater God must be!
The audience approves of the father’s declaration that there must be a feast because his son was dead and now lives, was lost and is found (15:24). The elder son does not hear this until the end of the parable (15:32), but the audience receives the whole elder section (15:25-32) in light of the father’s pronouncement.\textsuperscript{11} As the story ends, they recognize that the elder son’s attitude parallels theirs, but they are inclined to agree with the father that the “demand of the moment” is to celebrate.\textsuperscript{12} The parable thus re-presents this situation: Jesus is not wrongfully \textit{eating with such people} (as the Pharisees had viewed it); Jesus is “joining in celebrating God’s feast” because the lost are being found.\textsuperscript{13}

Reception activity is portrayed as follows: the audience, equipped with general first-century Palestinian cultural sensibilities as well as specific knowledge of a situation of conflict in which they and Jesus participate, recognizes that the sinners and tax collectors are something like the younger son—blameworthy, pathetic, but maybe genuinely repentant; that there is something right about a father who rejoices over the return of such a son and so something right about God being so disposed toward sinners—and that it might be possible that they, like the elder son who refuses to rejoice with his family, are refusing to share in God’s joy over the found among their own brothers and sisters. The possibility is presented; the audience must accept or reject it.

Linnemann’s interpretation presupposes that the audience performs several acts. They infer characters’ motives; make judgements about characters; employ conventional

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 76-77.

\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 79-80.

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 80.
knowledge; and connect real-life to the fictional story in which they now find themselves implicated. Linnemann appeals to these acts in a noncritical way as she goes about interpreting the text.

1.2 Parable as Metaphoric Narrative

In *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (1964), Amos N. Wilder articulates a vision of parable that brings literary concerns to the forefront of parable studies. Wilder regards parables as metaphors and metaphors as revelatory:

In the parables we have action-images. But these are only one kind of metaphor, extended metaphor…. Now we know that a true metaphor or symbol is more than a sign, it is a bearer of the reality to which it refers. The hearer not only learns about that reality, he participates in it. He is invaded by it. Here lies the power and fatefulness of art. Jesus’ speech had the character not of instruction and ideas but of compelling imagination, of spell, of mythical shock and transformation. Not just in an aesthetic sense but in the service of the Gospel.\(^\text{14}\)

Parables, as metaphors, not only refer to some reality but “bear” it, they make the reality available to the audience, occasion the audience’s participation in the reality.

Two years after Wilder’s *Early Christian Rhetoric*, Robert W. Funk (1966) recast Dodd’s rather innocent characterization of parable as metaphor in a similarly elevated way.\(^\text{15}\) Funk describes metaphor thus: “To say *A* is *B* is a metaphor, which, because of the juxtaposition of two discrete and not entirely comparable entities, produces an impact upon the imagination and induces a vision of that which cannot be conveyed by prosaic

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\(^\text{15}\) According to Dodd’s oft-cited definition, “At its simplest the parable is a metaphor or simile drawn from nature or common life, arresting the hearer by its vividness or strangeness, and leaving the mind in sufficient doubt about its precise application to tease it into active thought” (*Parables of the Kingdom*, 16).
or discursive speech.”¹⁶ Metaphoric language “produces an impact” that “induces a vision.” According to this view, Jesus employs parables to bring about for his audience experiences similar to his own personal experience of the kingdom of God.¹⁷

Paul Ricoeur, whose significance to parable studies exceeds his explicit discussions of parables, develops further the idea that parables are metaphoric.¹⁸ Ricoeur distinguishes substitution metaphors from “true metaphors,” tension metaphors:

[T]rue metaphors are untranslatable. Only metaphors of substitution are capable of a translation which restores the proper meaning. Tension metaphors are untranslatable because they create meaning…. Metaphor has more than an emotional value. It includes new information. In effect, by means of a “category


¹⁷ In parables “Jesus mediates his own vision and his own faith” (Wilder, Early Christian Rhetoric, 72). As John Dominic Crossan puts it (In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus, Eagle Books [Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1992 (1973)], 22), there is an intrinsic and inalienable bond between Jesus’ experience and Jesus’ parables. A sensitivity to the metaphorical language of religious and poetic experience and an empathy with the profound and mysterious linkage of such experience and such expression may help us to understand what is most important about Jesus: his experience of God.

Those treating parables as metaphors include Sallie McFague (Speaking in Parables: A Study in Metaphor and Theology [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1975]); Perrin (Language of the Kingdom); Zimmermann (Puzzling the Parables).

¹⁸ In the ’60s, ’70s, and ’80s, those studying parables did so in a milieu shaped by Ricoeur’s ideas, and this remains true today, e.g., Brad DeFord, “Paul Ricoeur and the Parable of the Lost Son,” in Reading Scripture with Paul Ricoeur, ed. Joseph A. Edelheit and James F. Moore, Studies in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur (New York: Lexington, 2021), 143-82. Perhaps most influential has been Ricoeur’s conclusion to The Symbolism of Evil, “The Symbol Gives Rise to Thought,” where he diagnoses a need, indeed, a longing to come to a second naïveté: “Beyond the desert of criticism, we wish to be called again” (trans. Emerson Buchanan [New York: Harper & Row, 1967 (1960)], 349). In much of his work, Ricoeur seeks to address “a general loss of sensitivity to symbolic language in modern Western civilization,” as Lewis S. Mudge puts it (Ricoeur, Essays on Biblical Interpretation, ed. Mudge [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980], 4). This project together with his interest in biblical hermeneutics put him in regular dialogue with those studying parables, especially, for example, Crossan and Perrin.
mistake,” new semantic fields are born from novel rapprochements. In short, metaphor says something new about reality.\textsuperscript{19}

By \textit{semantic innovation}, parables, as metaphoric narratives, redescribe reality.\textsuperscript{20} With this redescription, “Parables … disorient only in order to reorient us,” and “what is reoriented is less our will than our imagination”:

Our will is our capacity to follow without hesitation the once-chosen way, to obey without resistance the once-known law. Our imagination is the power to open us to new possibilities to discover another way of seeing, or acceding to a new rule in receiving the instruction of the exception.\textsuperscript{21}

Scott’s \textit{Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus} (1989) may be considered a mature product of this movement and so will represent the parable-as-metaphor school of thought.\textsuperscript{22} For Scott, Jesus is the proclaimer of the kingdom of God.\textsuperscript{23} Scott defines parable as “a \textit{mashal} that employs a short narrative fiction to reference a symbol”:

The definition has four components: (1) A parable is a \textit{mashal}; \textit{mashal} defines the genus of which parable is one species…. (2) A parable is a short, narrative fiction. This initially differentiates parables from other \textit{meshalim} like proverbs, riddles, sentences of the wise, and so forth. (3) What a parable does is reference…. (4)

\textsuperscript{19} Ricoeur, “Biblical Hermeneutics,” \textit{Semeia} 4 [1975]: 80; emphasis original.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 85.


\textsuperscript{22} That a fascination with metaphor led to excessive claims has been observed, e.g., by William F. Brosend II (“The Limits of Metaphor,” \textit{PRSt} 21 [1994]: 31-35).

\textsuperscript{23} Scott, \textit{Hear Then the Parable: A Commentary on the Parables of Jesus} (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1989), 48. It is otherwise assumed that the parables have a religious nature or are meant to serve a religious purpose (51); after all, Jesus is the “symbol-maker for the kingdom,” as Scott proposed in an earlier work (\textit{Jesus, Symbol-Maker for the Kingdom} [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1981]).
What a parable references is a symbol. In Jesus' parables the symbol is the kingdom of God.\(^{24}\)

Although parables refer to a symbol (for Jesus, the kingdom of God), they are not technically “metaphors” but rather “metaphoric,” or more broadly “connotative language”:

\[\text{[Parable]} \text{ belongs to the connotative aspect of language; it employs nonliteral language, speaking by indirection and suggestion. It demands interpretation precisely because it is about something else…. In connotative language the expression and content themselves stand for an unnamed content, and for this very reason such language is suggestive, in need of interpretation.}\(^{25}\)

Parables are anti-mytheme. Parables frustrate and “shatter” cultural myths, i.e., regularized stories that serve to resolve profound existential contradictions. They “take up mythical elements and usually block their mediating function.”\(^{26}\) The hearer of the parable is to follow the story and make sense of its metaphoric relation to the kingdom of God—in carrying this out, the first-century hearer finds her myth-driven expectations derailed.\(^{27}\)

In the case of The Prodigal Son, Scott claims that it is a testament to Luke’s art that he has managed to fool even the most suspicious of readers (e.g., Dodd, Jeremias, Linnemann) into believing that the literary context presents the parable’s historical

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 8.

\(^{25}\) Ibid., 10-11. Scott follows Tolbert’s judgement that parables are metaphoric but not technically “metaphors” (Perspectives on the Parables: An Approach to Multiple Interpretations [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979], 41-43).

\(^{26}\) Scott, Hear Then the Parable, 38-39. Crossan similarly develops an opposition between “parable” and “myth” in which myths serve to reconcile contradictions, establishing and maintaining a status quo, whereas parables serve to subvert and disturb conventions (The Dark Interval: Towards a Theology of Story, Eagle Books [Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1988 (1975)], 32-45).

\(^{27}\) Scott, Hear Then the Parable, 62.
context. In fact, this context miscues the reader; it is not conducive to hearing the parable as Jesus’s audience heard it. The parable has nothing to do with Pharisees, sinners, and tax collectors. Rather, the parable cues for the audience the “mytheme of elder-and-younger-brother” and then shatters this mytheme, not through the (expected!) acceptance of the younger son, but through the unexpected acceptance of the elder son. In this way the father—graciously accepting both sons, desiring the unity of all—images the kingdom of God.

The beginning of The Prodigal Son (15:11-12) cues for the audience the mytheme of elder-and-younger brother. This mytheme, prevalent in the Hebrew Bible and midrashim, involves a father favoring a younger, roguish son over an elder, dutiful son. In the religious repertoire of Israel this mytheme has served to justify God’s choosing Israel, a roguish younger son, and valuing Israel above the other nations. When the younger son asks for his share of the inheritance and the father complies, the audience considers the son’s request offensive and the father’s compliance foolish—but they nevertheless expect a story in which the younger son will be appealing and eventually come out on top. The audience is offended at the son’s leaving (15:13) because it is the younger son’s job to take care of the father in his old age, but they expect this departure to precipitate a trial, a confrontation which the younger son will ultimately overcome. Though the son is responsible for squandering his inheritance, the audience sympathizes

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28 Ibid., 100-105.

29 Ibid., 111-13.


31 Ibid., 113.
with him when famine hits (15:14), famine being “a feared scourge of the ancient world.” The son’s hiring himself out to a foreigner and feeding swine (15:15) strikes audiences as traitorous: the son has cut himself off from family and community.

The audience’s expectation that the son will make good is frustrated as the son longs for carob pods but does not receive any (15:16): the son has fallen from agent to passive sufferer. Driven by hunger, the son acts pragmatically, seeks to hire himself out to (to establish a legal relationship with) a master he knows to be generous (15:17-20), his father. The son’s humbling himself and the father’s reinstatement of him as a son (15:20-24) “convince an audience that this son will be restored to favorite status” after all. As Scott sees it, the father’s rationale for the feast (15:24) is literally true: the son was near death but is no longer in mortal peril; hired out in a foreign land, the son was lost, but now he is back. The audience is satisfied with the younger son’s restoration:

The celebration and joy encompass also the hearer. The father’s restoration of the son to honor restores the son in a hearer’s estimation. The hearer rejoices with the father in the return of the prodigal. The mytheme of the younger son story prepares the audience for his roguish behavior, for his being welcomed back, for his favorite status. In the actual telling, an audience can identify with both the father’s joy and the son’s relief. Father, son, and audience go into the feast together.

As the elder son learns of the celebration, refuses to participate, and complains to his father (15:25-30), “his anger confirms a hearer’s preconceived negative image. The father comes out of the house, just as he did at the approach of the younger son. But this son comes not as a humble prospective hired hand but as an arrogant elder brother whose

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32 Ibid., 116-17.

33 Ibid., 118.

34 Ibid., 118-19.
refusal to eat with his father and brother shames them.” Nevertheless, the father responds with gentleness (15:31-32). Addressing him affectionately as “child,” the father corrects the elder son’s perceptions: “Where the son saw himself as a faithful slave, the father views him as a companion (‘always with me’) and co-owner of the farm (‘all that is mine is yours’).”

The “scandal” of the parable is that the elder son is not rejected, not even reproached. The mytheme of younger-and-elder brother is supposed to “decide who is the favorite, the chosen”:

But in the parable the elder son’s fate is not like Esau’s: he is not hated, nor does the younger receive Jacob’s portion. Actually, the elder is the heir: “All that is mine is yours.” Nor is he banished: “I am always with you.” … This parable subverts a mytheme by which the kingdom decides between the chosen and rejected. Here the father rejects no one; both are chosen…. The metaphor for the kingdom is the father’s coming out, both for the younger son and for the elder. Apart from him is division and failure. In the parable, Jesus rejects any apocalyptic notion of some group’s being rejected at the expense of another. The parable radically rejects Israel’s self-understanding of itself as the favored, younger son. The kingdom is universal, not particularist…. [Its] image is the welcoming of a child.

The image of the father warmly accepting the elder son challenges the audience’s mytheme and, in the best case, induces an experience of the kingdom akin to Jesus’s own.

As for reception activity, Scott, like Linnemann, appeals to the audience’s performance of certain acts: making judgements, making inferences, identifying with

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36 Ibid., 121-22. In Scott’s view, both sons have a “paternal/masculine” view in which relationships are essentially legal whereas the father is a nourishing “maternal” figure, motivated not by honor or legal code but by concern for family relationships. Amy-Jill Levine argues against Scott’s father-as-maternal reading as it distracts from “questions concerning actual women in the family” and reinforces a presumption that “fathers were not, and could not be, nurturing, loving, or invested in their children” (Short Stories by Jesus: The Enigmatic Parables of a Controversial Rabbi [New York: HarperOne, 2014], 65).

37 Scott, Hear Then the Parable, 125.
characters, experiencing emotion, and developing an expectation. Scott is influenced by the audience-oriented literary theorist Wolfgang Iser, although the influence is not decisive in his reading of The Prodigal Son.\textsuperscript{38} Like Linnemann, Scott presupposes what audiences do.

1.3 Parable as Allegory

In *Interpreting the Parables* (1990), Blomberg argues for the long-enduring but minority position that Jesus’s parables are, in fact, allegories. As it happens, Jülicher’s rejection not only of allegorical interpretation but also of any idea that the parables of Jesus were allegories with multiple points of comparison was disputed early on. Christian A. Bugge (1903) and Paul Fiebig (1904; 1912) took Jülicher to task for rejecting Semitic literary precedents and judging Jesus’s parables instead in terms of Greek rhetoric. Allegory is common in rabbinic parables and many figures found in Jesus’s parables are stock symbols, e.g., a father or a king is a standard figure for God.\textsuperscript{39} Therefore it is more probable than not that Jesus used allegory.

In addition, arguments against allegory typically involve overdrawn distinctions between different types of figurative language: Denis Buzy (1912) and Maxime Hermaniuk (1947) dispute the Aristotelian distinction between simile and metaphor that Jülicher employs; Madeleine Boucher (1977) objects to the opposition between metaphor


and allegory operative in the parable-as-metaphor school of thought; allegory is not an inferior mode of expression.\textsuperscript{40}

Finally, Hans-Josef Klauck (1978) distinguishes “allegory” from “allegorizing” and “allegorization.” Blomberg writes,

Klauck concludes that important distinctions must be made between what he calls “allegory” (\textit{Allegorie}), a rhetorical device applicable to many literary genres which gives a symbolic dimension to a text; “allegorizing” (\textit{Allegorese}), which ascribes to a text hidden, often anachronistic meanings which its author never intended; and “allegorization” (\textit{Allegorisierung}), the allegorizing expansion and embellishment of a text that originally was already an allegory in simpler form. Turning to Jesus’s parables, Klauck concludes that many of them are “allegories,” some may have undergone a little “allegorization” … but that “allegorizing” per se, so typical of the pre-Jülicher era, is never justified.\textsuperscript{41}

While anachronistic allegorizing is of course to be avoided, parables of Jesus that were allegories to begin with are properly interpreted in the allegorical sense Jesus intended.\textsuperscript{42}

For Blomberg the parables are allegories. Extravagant details cue the audience to recognize that the story has a second-level meaning.\textsuperscript{43} The main characters, but not every

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Buzy, \textit{Introduction aux paraboles évangéliques}, \textit{EBib} (Paris: Gabalda, 1912); Hermaniuk, \textit{La parabole évangélique: enquête exégétique et critique} (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1947); Boucher, \textit{The Mysterious Parable: A Literary Study}, CBQMS 6 (Washington, DC: Catholic Biblical Association of America, 1977). In Boucher’s words: allegories are “nothing more and nothing less than an extended metaphor in narratory form” (20-21). Even some from the parable-as-metaphor camp recognize that the allegory/metaphor opposition is overblown, e.g., Scott, \textit{Hear Then the Parable}, 46.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Blomberg, \textit{Interpreting the Parables}, 49; Klauck, \textit{Allegorie und Allegorese in synoptischen Gleichnistexten}, NTAbh 13 (Münster: Aschendorff, 1978).
\item \textsuperscript{42} Blomberg (\textit{Interpreting the Parables}, 33-81) and Greg W. Forbes (\textit{The God of Old: The Role of the Lukan Parables in the Purpose of Luke’s Gospel}, JSNT [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2000], 25-33) recount arguments for and against viewing the parables as allegorical.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Blomberg, \textit{Interpreting the Parables}, 50-51.
\end{itemize}
detail, have allegorical correspondents.\textsuperscript{44} As allegory, a parable is intended to do three things:

(a) to illustrate a viewpoint in an artistic and educational way, (b) to keep its message from being immediately clear to all its hearers or readers without further reflection and (c) to win over its audience to accept a particular set of beliefs or act in a certain way. At first glance (a) and (b) can seem contradictory, but in fact they complement one another in service of (c). Speakers or writers who have a viewpoint they wish their audience to accept—one the audience does not currently hold—will seldom succeed by means of a straightforward explanation of their position. Rather they have to think of some innocuous method of introducing the subject, while at the same time challenging their listeners to think of it in a new way.\textsuperscript{45}

The viewpoint/message/set of beliefs that the parables communicate always has to do with the kingdom of God—which is “personally inaugurated through the ministry of Jesus.”\textsuperscript{46} The parables make not a single point but one point for each main character—typically three, two, or one.\textsuperscript{47} The role of the audience is to realize that the story is an allegory about the kingdom of God and to entertain whatever is proposed about that kingdom.

The Prodigal Son is a “simple three-point or ‘triadic’ parable” wherein something takes place between an authority figure, the father, and two subordinate figures, the younger and elder sons. It is typical in triadic parables for the subordinate character “who would have seemed to a first-century Jewish audience to have acted in a praiseworthy

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid., 64-66.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 62-63.

\textsuperscript{46} Ibid., 77.

\textsuperscript{47} Ibid., 193.
manner [to be] declared to be less exemplary than his apparently wicked counterpart.”

Blomberg summarizes what Jesus intended to communicate as follows:

(1) Even as the prodigal always had the option of repenting and returning home, so also sinners, however wicked, may confess their sins and turn to God in contrition. (2) Even as the father went to elaborate lengths to offer reconciliation to the prodigal, so also God offers all people, however undeserving, lavish forgiveness of sins if they are willing to accept it. (3) Even as the older brother should not have begrudged his brother’s reinstatement but rather rejoiced in it, so those who claim to be God’s people should be glad and not mad that he extends his grace even to the most undeserving.

Unlike Linnemann and Scott, Blomberg does not proceed by describing an audience’s reception of the parable from beginning to end. Only infrequently does he refer to reception activity. Because he allows a parable the possibility of communicating multiple things (in this case three points), he acknowledges some diversity of reception: “Different members of Jesus’ audience would have identified themselves most closely with different characters in the parable, so that one of these points might come across more strongly to them than the others.” Reception activity involves “identifying with” characters, and different people are drawn to identify with different characters. Blomberg also argues that the father’s reception of the younger son (15:20-24) will have seemed extraordinary to first-century audiences and so will have prompted them to realize that the father is a figure for God.

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48 Ibid., 197-98.

49 Ibid., 200-201. As should be evident, Blomberg accepts Luke’s context as reflective of Jesus’s historical context.

50 Ibid., 201. He suggests therefore that modern-day audiences hear the parable three times “trying to understand the action from the perspective of a different character each time.” He does not, however, develop this idea.

51 Ibid., 203-4.
Beyond these considerations, Blomberg discusses select ambiguities, directs against reading anything other than the three main characters as allegorical, and provides a contemporary application of the parable.\textsuperscript{52} Blomberg never explains just how the allegory is more effective pedagogically or rhetorically than would be a simple statement of the propositions being communicated.

To summarize: studies concerned with historical audiences recognize that audiences perform certain acts, but these acts are appealed to without critical consideration, some interpretive claim rather being in view. There is no more than a commonsense notion of the potential range and varying quality of reception activity.

2.1 Parable as Art

A “severely historical approach” to the parables is insufficient; parables address enduring human concerns; parables “have something to say” to present-day humanity; so

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 199-211. Blomberg makes some arguably problematic interpretive moves, even if it is assumed that the parable is an allegory. First, Blomberg acknowledges that “Mary Tolbert has shown that there is a close structural parallelism between both halves [of the parable]” in which “each section divides into four units alternating between narrated discourse (ND) and direct discourse (DD)” (I present this in outline below [2.2.2]). But then he claims that “the parable may just as easily subdivide into three rather than two episodes, one for each of the three main characters” (ibid., 199-200). The text does not “just as easily subdivide” in this way; a three-part division does, however, strengthen Blomberg’s claim that the parable has three main characters and three points.

Second, Blomberg considers the elder son’s claims suspect (209) but declines to scrutinize the sincerity of the younger son’s repentance, claiming that “there is no need to see any hidden meanings or motives in any of the details” (206).

Third, and most consequentially, Blomberg accepts that the father’s compliance with the younger son’s request will have “appeared as ‘deplorable,’” but he also understands the father to be a figure for God (203-4). He does not tell us why the father’s compliance is to be construed as “amazing patience and love” rather than foolish and bad parenting. In this, Bailey’s similar interpretation is similarly problematic (\textit{Poet and Peasant}, 161, 165-67).
Jones (1964) and Via (1964) propose. I turn now to studies of the parables wherein modern-day audiences are of primary interest, beginning with Jones and Via. On the one hand, what audiences do comes more to the fore; on the other hand, claims dealing with reception activity are often vague or otherwise problematic.

Jones and Via both conceive of parable as art. Art is admittedly an ill-defined category with various camps backing diverse understandings. For both Jones and Via, at the core of the conception are four ideas:

1. the work is a unique and singular thing, describable but not ultimately reducible to form and content;
2. the form is of a certain excellence;
3. the content relates to the human condition and has a certain profundity; and thus
4. the work transcends the occasion of its creation.

Both Jones and Via grant that Jesus employed parables polemically, but both insist that the parables as art are significant beyond their import in long-since-lost historical situations. A new line of interpretation is called for, an approach capable of showing that the parables illuminate the human condition and the human condition illuminates them. To this end, both Jones and Via turn to existentialist thought.

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55 Jones, Art and Truth, xi-xii.
2.1.1 Parable as Art in Jones’s *The Art and Truth of the Parables*

For Jones, art has an “impact”; art supplements experience; and artistically rendered characters take on a reality of their own. Jones makes various claims about the “impact” of art:

1. stories make an oblique “impact” because they have a “force” as “comprehensive literary images” (as opposed discrete propositions);⁵⁶

2. “It is partly through the representative and paradigmatic character which [The Prodigal Son] has achieved through familiarity that it makes its impact on the mind, and it is art in that it is not a propositional statement about how one should behave or how God acts: it shows the characters in action without any comment by the narrator”;⁵⁷

3. parables may have “an impact on the will and imagination”;⁵⁸

4. as art, a parable “offers expanding possibilities of impact on the mind and imagination with a recreative and seminal potency.”⁵⁹

Similarly, parables “stimulate new responses and agitate the mind into fresh creative thinking.”⁶⁰ Jones thus suggests that reception activity involves the audience’s mind, will, and imagination; the audience, moreover, may be induced to creativity. But Jones does not define “impact,” and art-impacts-the-audience formulations render audiences passive rather than active.

Jones further claims that art supplements experience:

The art of the story-teller … reveals to us what we would not have otherwise known, and exposes facets of experience which might well have remained hidden

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⁵⁶ Ibid., 114-15.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 122.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 165.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 160-61.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 123; e.g., The Prodigal Son has inspired works of art.
from us. It possesses … the ability to transfigure experience so that, in its recreated form, it assumes a kind of universal quality and thereby makes a particular moment, incident, or experience available to all through imaginative participation. 

In this way, reception activity includes “imaginative participation” wherein an experience is had, an experience otherwise unavailable to the audience.

Finally, Jones observes that fictional characters of a certain stature seem to be real-life figures with an independent existence:

Through this exercise of the creative imagination in the service of truth the parable, because it is art, however miniature its dimension, has imparted the quality of time-and-place-transcendence to its characters which is typical of all great narrative creations. The persons have become representative; they exist by their own right; we refer to them, as we refer to Mr. Micawber and Falstaff and Don Quixote and Job as if they possessed the momentum of a historical existence of their own: as if their creator had liberated them into the universal consciousness of man…. Anyone who has imaginatively created characters and embodied them in a fictitious story “lives” with them, dislikes or loves them, as if they were flesh-and-bone figures.

This implies that reception activity involves capacities for knowing and relating to other human beings, though Jones does not develop this line of thought.

For Jones, The Prodigal Son is a work of art and therefore capable of interpretation from his existentialist perspective. It would be misleading to characterize

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61 Ib. 130-31. Similarly, but in terms of knowledge disclosed rather than experience afforded (129-30):

This art reveals to us what we would otherwise not have known, peeling back, as it were, the surface of life and, within the compass of selected space and time, disclosing to the reader what would be accessible to him only, if at all, after a lifetime of experience and a knowledge of places and people entirely outside his range.

62 Ib. 125; emphasis original. Similarly (140):
The Prodigal Son and the Samaritan, to mention only two, have achieved an imaginative reality shared only by such characters as Hamlet and Don Quixote, who have become parabolic figures, and, like their seventeenth-century successors in literary invention, are equally representative of attitudes of mind or qualities of character.
his approach as a “method”; rather, Jones considers sections of The Prodigal Son in an existentialist mode. His interpretation proceeds in four sections headed with existentialist terms joined to snippets of text: “Freedom and Estrangement” (15:11-17); “The Personalness of Life: ‘I am no more worthy to be called thy son’” (15:19); “Longing and Return: ‘I will arise and go to my father’” (15:17); and “Anguish and Reconciliation” (15:20b-32). A sample of his interpretation is more indicative of his work than would be a summary. In the third section, on longing, return, and Luke 15:17, he writes:

A third type of longing is nostalgia, homesickness; not the intense, passionate Sehnsucht, yearning for a person and a presence, but Heimweh, longing for a place, for the home. The exile suffers nostalgia for his homeland; the homeless longs for a permanent resting-place; the disinherited, when he is not a rebel, longs for some place where he can strike his roots. This nostalgia, this homesickness, can be awakened by the memory of the scent of the heather, the tang of the sea, of the peat burning in the hearth, the singing of a song impregnated with the memories of generations. Homesickness, the longing for a place, is a longing for something which is already there, like Proust’s nostalgia for the Combray and Méséglise of his childhood and youth mediated through the memory. It is the longing to return to the place of one’s origin, even though one may be a stranger in it…. We do not know all that was in the boy’s mind: we can but exercise our imagination upon the parable as it stands. It is not improbable that he was moved by a mixture of motives from which genuine homesickness would scarcely be absent, and as he was the younger son, unestablished in an alien environment, it is most likely that the blending of nostalgia for the home, for his own place, with his longing for the love from which he had voluntarily estranged himself, was a powerful factor in inducing him to return…. While things went well he uttered no cry from the depths. The problem of existential discord did not arise. While his money lasted, while he was surrounded by wine and women, he was not aware of the emptiness, nausea, anxiety, dread, and despair which constitute the stock-in-trade of the existentialist terminology.  

As he puts it, Jones exercises his imagination upon the parable: he brings to the parable what he can muster from his experience with literature and existentialist philosophy and so contemplates the characters and actions of the narrative. All in all,

63 Ibid., 193-95.
Jones begins to uncover the potential imaginative and experiential depth of reception activity.

2.1.2 Parable as Art in Via’s *The Parables*

Like Jones, Via makes bold claims about the reception of art. Key for Via is the *aesthetic function of language*:

The peculiar function of language used aesthetically is that through its centripetal interlocking of content into form it grasps the attention of the beholder as a total psychosomatic unity—including conscious and unconscious aspects—in an intransitive and non-referential way.64

This definition has implications for reception activity in two ways: the beholder’s attention is grasped in an intransitive way; and the beholder’s total psychosomatic unity is involved.

The second thought is hardly elucidated. The idea is that form and content are united in art as body and mind are united in a person, so that man in his psychosomatic wholeness is addressed more completely in literary works than in non-aesthetic discourse: because in the former the palpable, shaping factor of the body itself is more fully present. The union of form and content speaks to the union of body and mind. Thus not only is thought called forth, but those forces of the self which are ulterior to the conscious are also engaged.65

Exactly how this works is never described or exemplified and this aspect of art does not seem to influence the parable interpretations that Via provides. Nevertheless, Via is here suggesting that the process of receiving a parable is holistic, or more so anyway than the receiving of an idea.

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64 Via, *Parables*, 79. Though Via frequently refers to something along the lines of “aesthetic function” (e.g., 15, 16, 24, 30, 33, 36, 37, 52-3, 57, 61, 88, 92), not until here does he define it.

65 Ibid., 76. Via adopts this idea from Elizabeth Sewell (*The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960], 34-39).
The first proposition—that the beholder’s attention is grasped in an intransitive way—is more substantial. Via distinguishes between aesthetic experience and non-aesthetic experience in terms of how attention is directed:

Aesthetic experience is a particular and unique type of experience of a correlative type of object. That is to say, it is the experience of intransitive, non-referential, or rapt attention to an object which is capable of evoking that kind of experience. In non-aesthetic modes of experience attention is transitive, that is, it is referred beyond the object of concern to other objects and meanings.66

Via’s theory is ultimately text-centric, so he develops this principally in terms of the autonomy of the aesthetic object.67 Nevertheless, appeals to “attention” and “experience” are also claims about reception activity: audiences govern their attention when receiving texts; they may maintain attention on the text or turn attention to its referents—or elsewhere. Via thus introduces into parable studies a new dimension of reception activity: the audience’s capacity to allocate attention in diverse ways.

When it comes to interpretation, Via is more methodical than Jones, though perhaps to the detriment of his work. “What is needed,” in Via’s understanding of the task, “is a hermeneutical and literary methodology which can identify the permanently significant element in the parables and can elaborate a means of translating that element without distorting the original intention.”68 The “translatable content,” the permanently significant element, is “an understanding of existence.”69

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66 Via, Parables, 73; emphasis original.

67 Ibid., 74-79.

68 Ibid., 23-24. Following Bultmann, Via insists that his project is one of translation, not addition (39):

It is not necessary, then, to add anything to the parable in order to make it contemporary (and this is true of all the parables as we have defined them); all one need do is to translate—as much as is necessary and possible—the
The parables dramatize the two primary human possibilities:

A parable as a whole dramatizes an ontological possibility—that which is there and possible in principle for man as man—and the two basic ontological (human) possibilities which the parables present are the gain or the loss of existence, becoming authentic or inauthentic. The prodigal son gains his existence, and the unforgiving servant loses his. But each parable also depicts how existence is ontically—actually and concretely—gained or lost, and the aesthetic form presses the two—the ontological and the ontic—into a unity. We could then say that each parable dramatizes how the basic human possibilities of gaining or losing existence may actually occur.70

Via identifies these two possibilities with the two classic plot types, tragedy and comedy:

“the ontological possibility—possibility in principle—of losing existence is aesthetically the tragic movement, and the ontological possibility of gaining existence is aesthetically the comic movement.”71

This method is problematic in two ways. First, most parables simply do not fit well into these two categories—Via finds only five tragic and three comic parables. Second, the method subordinates the particulars of the parable to the abstracted plot movement; the method is not at all receptive to the intricate complex of relationships that constitute the form/content unity of the work of art, despite how important these things are in Via’s theory.72

understanding of existence which is already in it. Thus Bultmann’s basic hermeneutical principle—that the most adequate question to put to the Bible, as to any significant text, is what its understanding of the possibilities of human existence is—is eminently appropriate for the parables.

69 Ibid., 37.

70 Ibid., 41.

71 Ibid., 101.

72 Ricoeur criticizes Via’s “so-called literary-existential approach” in another way. According to Ricoeur, Via fails to provide a warrant for moving from literary
Via classifies The Prodigal Son as a comedy in which the younger son indeed experiences a tragic downfall but eventually enjoys a comic rise to restoration. Though Via accepts the elder son section (15:25-32) as an original part of the parable, he virtually ignores it (a side effect of shoehorning the parable into the category “comedy”). Via proceeds by expounding upon certain aspects of the parable in terms of the situation of humankind. For example, Via interprets 15:17 by comparing a biblical view of humankind with semi-secularist and secularist views:

The recognition scene presents man as capable of “coming to himself,” and a part of this is the recollection of one’s past. The son’s confession is to some extent awakened by the memory of his father and his home. Man is seen as capable of recognizing who and where he is, particularly of knowing something is wrong. This image of man provides a clear contrast with those moderns whom Karl Heim would call the thoroughgoing secularists. The semi-secularist may assert that life is painful and meaningless, but he is still protesting this state of affairs. He agrees with the prodigal at least in recognizing that something is wrong. The thoroughgoing secularist, on the other hand, has come to accept the normalcy of hell. He has given up the illusion that life ought to be meaningful and therefore has no protest to make. The loss of meaning is not wrong but rather normal. The prodigal is able not only to recognize that something is wrong but to resolve to do something about it.

The experiential quality of art—the “rapt attention” on the object—does not seem to inform Via’s interpretation; rather, there is sober reflection on the “permanently significant element” in categories (e.g., secularist, semi-secularist) that Via brings to the analysis to existential consideration. To address this, Ricoeur “[tries] to identify the intermediary link between a formal explanation and an existential interpretation as being the metaphoric process at work in the structure of the narrative” (“Biblical Hermeneutics,” 30; emphasis original).

Ibid., 165.

Ibid., 163.

text. The holistic notion of reception Via describes in his theory is now forgotten. Even so, in his theory Via makes the important observation that audiences allocate attention in different ways.

2.2 The Polyvalent Form of Parables

The most extensive treatments of reception activity are embedded in arguments validating multiple interpretations. Wittig (1977) and Tolbert (1979) begin in similar ways. Wittig’s essay follows three readings of The Prodigal Son: Freudian, Jungian, and structuralist. These readings make it apparent to Wittig that “different readings of the parables by different readers yield different meanings.” In light of this, Wittig sees a need “to confront the question of how a text, generated by one single deep structural pattern, can have multiple, often apparently contradictory meanings—that is, how a text can be plurisignificant, or polyvalent.”

This question becomes more pointed in Tolbert’s work. Tolbert claims to have demonstrated that

Historical-critical interpretations, existential-theological interpretations, literary-critical interpretations, and even Greimasian-structuralist interpretations bear witness to the same phenomenon: competent scholars using essentially the same

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78 Wittig, “Multiple Meanings,” 76. After reviewing each of the critical approaches employed in *Semeia* 9 (80-83), Wittig concludes: “We can see that each one is capable of giving us, in itself, an interesting and adequate explanation of the work it is used to examine” (83). It is by no means apparent, however, by what criteria the explanations are found to be “adequate.”
methods can apparently arrive at equally valid, though different, interpretations of the same parable.\footnote{Tolbert, \textit{Perspectives on the Parables}, 30. Tolbert can claim to have shown that scholars with similar interests and procedures sometimes arrive at different interpretations, but not that they do so using “essentially the same methods,” if “method” means something along the lines of a well-defined set of procedures. Moreover, as with Wittig, Tolbert does not describe the criteria by which the interpretations are found to be “valid.”}

Given this, Tolbert sees the need to determine what about the parable form makes it so amenable to multiple interpretations and to establish a meta-critical system capable of adjudicating the validity of any given interpretation—as many but not all are equally valid.\footnote{Ibid., 30.}

In the following three sections I describe and critique Wittig’s first theory of multiple meanings (2.2.1), Wittig’s second theory (2.2.2), and Tolbert’s theory of interpretation (2.2.3).\footnote{Wittig does not draw a clear distinction between what I am calling her first and second theories; nevertheless, she pursues two independent lines of thought.}

\section*{2.2.1 Wittig’s First Theory of Multiple Meanings}

The field of semiotics distinguishes between three dimensions of a communicative event:

\begin{quote}
[A] complete semiotic study of a system of signs—a verbal text, say—would focus on the sign in its several dimensions: the relationship of signs to one another, along the \textit{syntactic axis}; the relationship of sender and receiver, along the \textit{pragmatic (or rhetorical) axis}; and the relationship of sign to referent, along the \textit{semantic axis}.\footnote{Wittig, “Multiple Meanings,” 79; emphasis added.}
\end{quote}

Wittig is principally interested in the semantic axis: the relationship of sign to referent.

Wittig defines “the semantic structure of the parabolic sign” as “a duplex connotative
system in which the precise significance is left unstated.” In order to understand what a “duplex connotative system” is, it is necessary first to understand the significative process proposed in semiotics. A “sign” consists of two things, “a linguistic signifier (Sr) and its conceptual signified (Sd).” A sign denotes or designates a “referent,” i.e., “an object or event that has (or could have) existence in extralinguistic reality.” For example, the phrase younger son is a signifier; the concept of a younger son is its corresponding signified; and the particular younger son being spoken of is the referent.

In a “duplex connotative system” the signified is taken to be a signifier and the whole significative process is duplicated: there is a “second order” process. In this second order process the signified and the referent must be supplied by the audience. For example, in the first order significative process, the phrase younger son is the signifier; the concept of a younger son is the signified; and the younger son designated (e.g., the younger son in The Prodigal Son) is the referent. In the second order significative process, the first order signified, the concept of a younger son, is taken to be a signifier of some other signified not given in the text. In the second order significative process, the concept of a younger son is the signifier; a subordinate position vis-à-vis a superior, for example, could be the signified; and a person’s role vis-à-vis God could be the particular (though abstract) thing being designated, the referent. Thus in a parable defined as a “duplex connotative system,” “The same sign has two referents, only one of which has been directly supplied within the conventional code of the language. The other must be

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83 Ibid., 84.

84 Ibid.
supplied within the conventions of another sort of system: the system of beliefs and concepts held by the perceiver.”

There are three constraints upon the significative process. The first is congruence: “For instance, the parabolic statement ‘a certain man had two sons’ could hardly be interpreted by the statement ‘God has three kinds of children.’ The two structures are not sufficiently congruent.” The second is that an interpretation must make sense given “the framing structure within which a particular parable sign is embedded”; Wittig does not say what exactly this means. The third is that the interpretation must be “within the bounds of [the] cognition of the interpreter,” i.e., an interpreter can produce only those interpretations that lie within the scope of her intellectual abilities.

According to Wittig’s semiotic argument, “It is likely that the signified owes as much to the meaning system in the mind of the perceiver as it does to the signifier itself.” Moreover, in some cases, as in the essays of *Semeia* 9, a methodological interpretive program in the mind of the interpreter, e.g., a Freudian analytic model, will

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85 Ibid., 85.

86 Ibid., 87.

87 Ibid., 87-88. Wittig identifies the complex set of frames in which *The Prodigal Son* is embedded: “The Prodigal Son is a narrative embedded within a gospel narrative, which is in turn embedded within a collection of other narratives and epistles, which is in turn embedded within a larger collection of sacred scriptures from an earlier culture.” Wittig does not specify in what way these frames are to be taken into account—in what way they are to act as constraints upon interpretation.

88 Ibid., 89.

89 Ibid.
have ready-made slots into which the receiver may try to fit the material.\textsuperscript{90} Wittig concludes:

When these models are used to describe a parabolic text (or to treat a text as though it were parabolic, reading through the first-order system to “discover” a second-order system), they provide meaning to the text rather than discovering meaning in the text. This phenomenon does not invalidate these interpretations, of course, nor the models from which they are derived; it only requires that we become aware of the model which has generated the significance and understand by what means that significance has been achieved.\textsuperscript{91}

But Wittig’s theory may be less consequential than it appears, on three accounts. First, in the beginning of the quotation above, Wittig mentions two possibilities: to describe a parabolic text and to treat a text as though it were parabolic. While Wittig defines “parabolic form” as a “duplex connotative system,” and some interpreters treat parable texts as if they have this form, Wittig seems to presuppose that this “parabolic form” is inherent in the parable texts. Indeed, it is not clear that parable texts are necessarily more polyvalent than other statements since any statement might be treated “as though it were parabolic”—and Wittig does not set out the basis on which a text is to be treated as though it were parabolic.

Second, Wittig simply assumes that “parabolic form” is a “duplex connotative system.” In a duplex connotative system as Wittig describes it, there is “congruence” between numerous first order signs and second order signs. As the relationship is reliant upon congruence, what Wittig describes is a theory of allegorical signification, or better, a theory of allegorizing—of treating a text as allegorical regardless of the intentions of the author. “Polyvalence” is no more than the allegorizability of the text.

\textsuperscript{90} Ibid., 89-90.

\textsuperscript{91} Ibid., 90-91.
Finally, Wittig claims that this process of allegorization does not “invalidate” these interpretations. That this is true in some sense may be conceded: on an abstract semiotic plane various allegorizations, e.g., Freudian, Marxist, spiritual, may all result from the same process, the only difference being the particulars of the analytic model operative; none of the allegorizations is any more or less adequate to the sign system. While parables might mean a great many things on a purely semiotic basis, acknowledging this does not invalidate positions informed by pragmatic realities, e.g., what Jesus/God/the evangelists intend by the parables may be of singular importance to Christians.

At first glance, Wittig seems to have a rich sense of reception activity because she gives the audience a key role in making meaning out of the text. But under scrutiny her argument thins out. Reception activity is allegorizing: an expert interpreter brings an analytical model to the text and “interprets” or “explains” it in terms of congruences between structures in the model and structures in the text. As we shall see, her second theory is less developed but more promising in certain respects.

2.2.2 Wittig’s Second Theory of Multiple Meanings

In the last section of her essay, Wittig sets aside her semantic argument and pursues a different matter: “it is not what the parables have meant to these various audiences that is important, but how the parables have meaning to one reader or another.” She is interested in “what goes on in the reader’s mind as he confronts the text.”92 But the discussion is brief; Wittig presents not so much an argument as a reflection based on a

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92 Ibid., 94; emphasis original.
few quotations from Iser, *The Implied Reader*, concerning indeterminate texts, that is, texts which are

so fragmentary that one’s attention is almost exclusively occupied with the search for connections between fragments … in such cases, the text refers back directly out our own preconceptions—which are revealed by the act of interpretation that is a basic element of the reading process.\(^93\)

Iser is interested principally in the indeterminacy that arises from “gaps” in the text, gaps not of information, e.g., the hair color of a character, but of coherence, when it is not clear how a textual statement or unit is related to other statements or units. In these cases, the audience acts to connect, unify, make sense of the fragments. Wittig concludes that for all audiences in Jesus’s presence, in the early church, and throughout the centuries,

The significance of the parable does not lie wholly in the context, nor wholly in the structure of the narrative; it lies in the *reader’s own act of structuration*, in his efforts to find coherence and significance, to understand both the parable and his own system of values and beliefs which is called to his immediate attention by the puzzle of the parable’s indeterminacy.\(^94\)

Wittig stops short of saying that Jesus meant parables to be this sort of puzzle and employed them in this way in his teaching. In any case, Wittig gives the impression that the parable’s distinct capacity to bring a reader’s system of values to her attention is of more consequence than the choice of one or other of the multiple interpretations she has validated. Indeed, if “the reader’s own act of structuration” is essential, then “the imposition of an interpretation—*any* interpretation—by one reader upon another reader is


\(^94\) Wittig, “Multiple Meanings,” 96; emphasis original.
a perilous act, for to offer a ‘reading’ of a parable to an audience is to circumvent this crucial aspect of the meaning of the parabolic text.”

According to this second theory, the individual, prompted by the indeterminacy of the text, draws upon her own resources and, in this process, becomes more aware of her own preconceptions, beliefs, etc. Moreover, the audience is potentially any person, not necessarily an expert of some kind employing a method of analysis. Wittig begins to develop, though ever so briefly, an articulation of the process of reception that requires personal engagement. The idea remains embryonic, however, and without a more definite understanding of the “reader’s own act of structuration” there is a danger that this notion of reception activity will be inflated, even romanticized.

2.2.3 Tolbert’s Theory of Multiple Meanings

Reminiscent of Jones and Via, Tolbert takes parables to be “literary texts with a certain timeless dimension.” Unlike Wittig, whose chief goal is to produce a metatheory that can account for diverse interpretations, Tolbert intends to develop “another option for research and exploration which is specifically designed to promote the parables, and biblical material generally, as living texts, addressing and being addressed by the concerns of contemporary existence.” Tolbert accepts Wittig’s semiotic theory of multiple meanings and proposes a similar theory in which it is necessary for audiences to

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95 Ibid., 97; emphasis original.

96 Tolbert, Perspectives on the Parables, 14. By “the concerns of contemporary existence,” Tolbert has in mind the concerns of readers of any era, historical or modern-day.
provide the unstated “tenor” in a metaphoric process—Tolbert’s “tenor” being equivalent to Wittig’s “second-order signified.”

As Tolbert sees it, the evangelists set a precedent for the interpretation of material in the light of readers’ “present” concerns:

The evangelists, or the tradition before them, were not concerned to preserve the eschatological stress of the historical Jesus; rather, they attempted to refashion the material they inherited with, as it seems to us, remarkable freedom in order to direct that material specifically to problems faced in their own communities. The very writing of the gospels, then, was an exercise in hermeneutics, an attempt to understand what the material could mean for a particular period in the history of the early church. Rather than accepting as normative the actual presentation of the parables found in the gospels, should we not instead emulate this hermeneutical process? The gospel writers in their use of the parables as well as much other traditional material establish a precedent for interpreting the words from the past in light of the present.

Allegorizing empowered the church for centuries “to apply orally in preaching and teaching a historically conditioned text to all the detailed and complex circumstances of existence.” Indeed, the parables’ “polyvalency” continues to present “an opportunity for preachers, teachers, and scholars alike to discover the ways in which ancient scriptural material can interact with contemporary cultural concerns.”

Tolbert claims that two principles are to act as controls on interpretation. First, “Preservation of the integrity of the parable story should be the guiding principle of all interpretations”; for example, an interpreter who accepts all of 15:11-32 as constituting The Prodigal Son cannot simply ignore the elder son section (15:25-32)—the

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97 Ibid., 33-50.
98 Ibid., 62-63.
99 Ibid., 63.
100 Ibid., 65.
interpretation must be adequate to the parable in its entirety.\textsuperscript{101} Second, “In a literary work form and content, though distinguishable, are inseparable; therefore a proper articulation of the meanings of a particular text is inextricably bound to a proper understanding of its special form”—interpretation requires a thorough understanding of how the story works and how it is structured.\textsuperscript{102}

Within these constraints, interpretation is an “art” in which the interpreter is involved in two ways. First, the interpreter chooses the “context” within which the text will be interpreted, traditional or otherwise.\textsuperscript{103} In her interpretation of The Prodigal Son, Tolbert chooses psychoanalytic thought as the context because she believes that “contemporary humanity to a greater and greater degree articulates its self-understanding in psychological terms.”\textsuperscript{104} Second, the interpreter inevitably provides what Tolbert calls a “focus”:

\begin{quote}
[\text{E}ven when the material used to determine the nature of the tenor or the second-order signified is controlled primarily by traditional doctrines or the pervasive
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 71.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 71-72.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 68-69. Tolbert argues that the literary (gospel/biblical) contexts are not helpful: some parables are contextualized in different ways, e.g., The Lost Sheep, which appears in Matt 18:12-13; Luke 15:4-6; Gos. Thom. 98:22-27; other contexts “do not seem to fit the stories at all,” e.g., The Workers in the Vineyard in Matt. 20:1-15 (ibid., 54-62).

Of course the parables are often studied in their gospel contexts, e.g., Jack Dean Kingsbury, \textit{The Parables of Jesus in Matthew 13: A Study in Redaction-Criticism} (Richmond, VA: John Knox, 1969); Bailey, \textit{Poet and Peasant}; John Drury, \textit{The Parables in the Gospels: History and Allegory} (New York: Crossroad, 1985); Donahue, \textit{Gospel in Parable}; Forbes, \textit{God of Old}. Literary-critical gospel commentaries also treat the parables in their gospel contexts. It is strange that Tolbert does not consider consequential the likelihood that most people encounter the parables either in their gospel contexts or in other traditional Christian settings, e.g., congregational worship.

\textsuperscript{104} Tolbert, \textit{Perspectives on the Parables}, 94.
influence of a specific context, the personal sensitivity, interest, and perspective of the interpreter supply a focus through which this traditional or contextual material acts upon the parable story…. The actual tenor or second-order signified that is articulated at the completion of interpretation is derived from the subtle and complex interrelationships and interdependencies among these three: the parable story, the context, and the particular insights, sensitivity, and concerns of the interpreter.105

The sensitivities, interests, and perspective of the interpreter are all involved in reception activity; thus “the process of interpreting the parables can reveal much about the values, concerns, and priorities of the individual.”106 For Tolbert, interpretation is always creative, but as a “creative art” there is “the necessity of learning and mastering the techniques of literary and historical criticism essential to such an interpretive process.”107 While there is a personal dimension, interpretation is an art requiring the mastery of certain techniques in order to mitigate the effects of the personal dimension. Interpretation is for experts; as Tolbert puts it, “preachers, teachers, and scholars.”

Tolbert proceeds then to interpret The Prodigal Son.108 She takes pains to delineate the structure of the text; in my judgment she develops the most convincing outline of its structure in all of parable studies. After the introduction (15:11) and the initiating action (15:12a), The Prodigal Son has a “parallel plot type … with one action (the younger son’s journey) beginning and ending and then a second action (the elder son’s confrontation with the father) beginning and ending.” According to alternations

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105 Ibid., 69; emphasis original.

106 Ibid., 70. Variations in “focus” explains why interpreters following “essentially the same methods” arrive at different interpretations.

107 Ibid., 70.

108 Tolbert gives two interpretations; the second is meant to be an example of bad interpretation, one that is not adequate to the literary structure of the parable (ibid., 107-14).
between narrated discourse (ND) and direct discourse (DD), Tolbert divides these two into four parallel sections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ND:</th>
<th>DD:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Younger son’s journey away, vv. 12b-16</td>
<td>Younger son’s decision to return, vv. 17-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder son’s return home, vv. 24b-26</td>
<td>Servant’s explanation, v. 27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Father’s reception of younger son, v. 20</td>
<td>Father’s reception of elder son, v. 28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ND:</td>
<td>DD:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Younger son’s confession And father’s response, vv. 21-24a</td>
<td>Younger son’s accusation and father’s response, vv.29-32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Tolbert, “The parable presents us with three characters, an adult and two children. The adult must mediate between the two children; he goes out of the house to talk with them, to restore them to himself (vv. 20 and 28).” There is a mediating figure, a wasteful, devouring figure, and a judgmental, unforgiving figure; in psychoanalytic terms, an ego figure, an id figure, and a superego figure. The parable embodies “the wish for unity … the desire for wholeness, the resolution of conflicts within the psyche of every individual. The parable dramatizes … the human psyche.”

Tolbert resolves various ambiguities as best fits her overarching interpretation. For example: she takes at face value the elder son’s characterization of the younger son’s behavior—his spending the money on prostitutes (15:30); this reading reinforces her argument that the younger son is an id character. Similarly, she emphasizes the idea that the younger son’s “repentant attitude” comes about from a “desire for food” and

109 Ibid., 98. Tolbert notes several verbal repetitions that reinforce and elaborate this structure (99-101).

110 Ibid., 101.

111 Ibid., 102.

112 Ibid.
downplays any sense that the son is genuinely repentant—again reinforcing his id
character.\textsuperscript{113} Finally, Tolbert construes the father’s statement to the elder son not as a
rebuke but as a statement of acceptance—the father is the mediating ego figure.\textsuperscript{114} She
does not distinguish narrative ambiguity, when the very events of the story itself are
obscure, from the second-level significative incompleteness she believes to be at the heart
of polyvalence.

Reception activity in Tolbert’s theory is the imperfect “art of interpretation.” This
is an expert activity. Reception necessarily involves the personal insights, sensitivity, and
concerns of the interpreter, but techniques can be learned that mitigate the effects of this
personal dimension—allowing the interpreter to develop an interpretation fit for her
contemporary community.

2.3 Hedrick’s Reader Response Approach to Parables

In Many Things in Parables, Hedrick employs what reviewers have labeled a
reader response approach/hermeneutic.\textsuperscript{115} Though Hedrick decries the “embarrassing”
state of parable scholarship, he himself presents—so I will argue—an incoherent

\begin{center}
\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{113} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 104.
\end{itemize}
\end{center}
theory. His account of how parables “mean” and his portrayal of what audiences “do” are both problematic. But reception activity features prominently in Many Things in Parables. Consideration of Hedrick’s claims helps to expose the complexity of an audience’s reception of the parables.

2.3.1 Hedrick and the Meaning of Parables

Hedrick makes the pithy claim that “the parables mean exactly what they say—and maybe more.” Setting aside for now “and maybe more,” the primary statement is “the parables mean exactly what they say.” So for Hedrick, legitimate engagement with the parables is engagement with the texts alone, to be supplemented when necessary with knowledge of first-century Palestinian village life. The parables are not metaphors, metaphoric, allegorical, or in any way symbolic or structured so as to suggest a second level of significance.

Methodologically speaking, Hedrick holds together three arguably contradictory things:

1. a firm disassociation between what a parable is and what a parable does;
2. the assumption, apparently, that the parables are literary art; and
3. the claim that the “realism” of the parables rules out figurative interpretation.

I now consider these in turn.

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116 Hedrick, Many Things in Parables, xi. The work nevertheless received positive reviews: Carol S. LaHurd (review in CBQ 67 [2005]: 345-46), Hood, and Asher are all mildly positive; Metzger is glowing; Skinner, critical.

117 Many Things in Parables is introductory, but Hedrick treats reception activity more here than in his earlier Parables as Poetic Fictions: The Creative Voice of Jesus (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994).

118 Ibid., 103-4.
First, Hedrick dissociates “what a parable is” from “how a parable functions.” He defines parable as “a brief, freely invented, narrative fiction, comprised of beginning, middle, and end, dramatizing a common human experience or some incident from nature.” But he then warns: “The definition of what a parable is should not be confused with the question of how parables function.” By “function,” Hedrick means the task parables are to accomplish—how they are employed. He observes that storytellers tell stories for many reasons, though he identifies only two, entertainment and illustration. It is unknown why Jesus told his stories, Hedrick claims. And so “We are left with the parables, which make good sense as stories.” The texts alone are to set the parameters for their interpretation.

But as Christopher W. Skinner points out, “we are not left with the parables themselves. Rather, we are left with inherently theological narratives (the Gospels) that present Jesus using parables in inherently theological contexts.” Moreover, the axiom that “the parables … make good sense as stories” begs the question, just what is meant by “good sense.” Hedrick himself recognizes that stories are told for various reasons.

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119 Ibid., 9.

120 As Hedrick puts it: “The reasons stories are told may be as numerous as the people who tell them” (ibid., 29). Though inevitably true—in terms of the particular goals of the storyteller and the subject-matter of the story—this statement is surly obfuscating: the many specific reasons that stories are told may be grouped into a set number of general categories, such as entertainment and illustration, to cite Hedrick’s examples.

121 Ibid., 31-34.

122 Ibid., 35.

123 Skinner, Review.
Therefore the “sense” that any story “makes” has something to do with the storyteller’s purpose.

Second, when it suits his purpose, Hedrick characterizes the parables as obscure artifacts, e.g., “Since we simply do not know how Jesus used parables and clearly have no hope of ever discovering his intention, the issue of how they are used should not be solved by an assumption.” In Hedrick’s view, virtually all scholars do exactly this, solve the issue by an assumption. It is more accurate to say that most parable studies are informed by a pragmatic hypothesis, and that the hypothesis operative in any given study is sometimes made up of assumptions and is sometimes itself merely assumed: the hypothesis is not acknowledged, neither its content nor its uncertain status. As it happens, Hedrick does not consistently treat the parables as obscure artifacts; rather, his

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124 Hedrick, Many Things in Parables, 102.

125 Wright proposes a more narrowly conceived version of the same idea. He argues that parable interpretation involves a “creative response” (Voice of Jesus, 2). A parable is a “figure,” i.e., “[a] deviant or individualized form of speech”; the interpreter gives a “creative response” when she construes a parable along the lines of a specific figure—Wright specifies simile, irony, synecdoche, metonymy, hyperbole, metaphor, and metalepsis (ibid., 7-8).

John P. Meier pinpoints assumptions about the ministry of Jesus as a major problem in parable studies (A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus, vol. 5 Probing the Authenticity of the Parable, AYBRL [New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016], 21 n. 2):

One problem with many books and articles on the parables of Jesus involves their attempts to discover the supposedly original meaning of a given parable within the ministry of the historical Jesus. The often unaddressed difficulty with this project is that such “discovering” presupposes a previously achieved, overall understanding of Jesus’ message and ministry that can serve as the interpretive framework for the parables—an understanding, however, that is never established by the authors of these books prior to the act of interpreting the parables. Rather, quite often some overall portrait of Jesus is quietly imported from the work of a noted quester (e.g., Joachim Jeremias, Günther Bornkamm, or Ernst Käsemann) in order to supply the parables with the larger context they need for discovering their “original” meaning.
unacknowledged pragmatic hypothesis is that parables are works of literary art intended to expand an audience’s “vision of life’s possibilities.”\textsuperscript{126}

Hedrick places the parables in theoretical frameworks adopted from the New Critics of the American literary tradition. The \textit{heresy of paraphrase}, the \textit{intentional fallacy}, and the \textit{affective fallacy} are all presented as literary law applicable to the parables. With respect to the \textit{heresy of paraphrase}: as Hedrick puts it, a poem, and by analogy a parable, “presents an experience of the poet,” \textit{is} “the experience of the poet,” and “provides access to the poet’s experience.”\textsuperscript{127} Therefore no reading, paraphrase, or summary can replace the poem/parable: “The poet’s experience, which is the poem, is much more than the summary.”\textsuperscript{128} Appealing to the heresy of paraphrase, Hedrick is not treating parables as obscure artifacts with an unknown purpose but as poetic works providing access to/consisting of the experience of Jesus.

Hedrick also argues according to the \textit{intentional fallacy}:

The New Critics, working with certain kinds of poetry and short stories, argued that everything a critic needed for judging an artistic work (poem, or short story) was present within the work itself. Traditional criticism, on the other hand, argued that the critic should learn everything possible about the life of the artist, the artist’s intentions, and the historical period in which the artist produced the work. The New Critics countered that to judge a work by what the artist \textit{intended} was clearly wrongheaded; what really mattered was what the artist \textit{accomplished}…

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\textsuperscript{126} Hedrick, \textit{Many Things in Parables}, 85.
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\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 12-13.
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\textsuperscript{128} Ibid., 54. Moreover, Hedrick supplies the following section header: “Does an Interpreter’s Summary Truth or Moral Conclusion to a Parable Actually Capture the Irreducible Essence of the Parable, or Does It Represent a Particular Reader’s Response?” (13). But if it is an “irreducible” essence, then presumably it cannot be captured by a summary of any kind. The question is whether it is “irreducible.” In addition, there is a false dilemma: a summary either captures the irreducible essence or it is merely “a particular reader’s response.” On the contrary, a summary can be more than a subjective statement even if it is not a full re-presentation of the text.
\end{flushright}
Thus, the intentional fallacy argues that the place to begin studying parables is with the parable itself, rather than with the intention of Jesus in inventing the parable—since we have no idea what that was.\textsuperscript{129}

I find two problems here. First, Hedrick again assumes that the parables are literary art—or at any rate to be treated as candidate works of art rather than obscure artifacts. The New Critics themselves recognize that “practical messages … are successful if and only if we correctly infer the intention.”\textsuperscript{130} If Jesus created parables for practical purposes, e.g., to persuade audiences, and Hedrick claims we cannot know Jesus’s purposes, then consideration of the author’s intent turns out to be warranted.

In addition, the intentional fallacy has to do with \textit{judging} a work of art, evaluating it as good art (art proper) or bad art (sham art, or not art at all).\textsuperscript{131} But this is almost never the task of parable studies—or, indeed, biblical studies. Hedrick acknowledges that the fallacy pertains to \textit{judging an artistic work}, but he broadens this when he applies it to the parables, switching the verb from \textit{judging} to \textit{studying}. But the New Critics themselves readily admit that even in the case of art extratextual information is admissible in some types of investigation.\textsuperscript{132} In any case, when Hedrick applies the theories of the New

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 50-51; emphasis original.
  \item \textsuperscript{130} W. K. Wimsatt and M. C. Beardsley, “The Intentional Fallacy,” \textit{The Sewanee Review} 54 (1946): 469-70.
  \item \textsuperscript{131} Wimsatt and Beardsley claim that “the design or intention of the author is neither available nor desirable as a standard for judging the success of a work of literary art” (ibid., 468).
  \item \textsuperscript{132} They identify “literary biography” specifically (ibid., 477). And, of course, some argue against the New Critics altogether, defending the relevance of the author’s intention for interpretation, e.g., E. D. Hirsch, \textit{Validity in Interpretation} (New Haven: Yale University Press), 1967.
\end{itemize}
Critics to the parables, and he does this without explanation, he is working from an assumption, an unacknowledged hypothesis: the parables are works of art.¹³³

Finally, according to Hedrick the “realism” of parables renders them incompatible with figurative interpretation:

Precisely because the parable re-presents aspects of a real world and imposes that world on the reader, it violates the integrity of the parable to look for meaning in a secondary level of reality, which the reader must imaginatively devise and foist on the parable. In other words, parables mean exactly what they say, and should be studied for what they are rather than for what readers take them to “signify.” Their realism provides a control on overactive imaginations.¹³⁴

And similarly,

The parable puts all its cards on the table face up, and deliberately conceals nothing from the reader: A farmer is a farmer, a weed is a weed, a fig tree is a fig tree, a steward is a steward, a type of soil is a type of soil, and so on. Attempts to make them something else suitable to another plane of reality are mocked by the transparency of the feature in its natural environment in the parable.¹³⁵

That parables typically feature “realistic” subject-matter has long been recognized.¹³⁶ But since—so Hedrick insists—it is not known why Jesus spoke his parables, the idea that a parable “puts all its cards on the table face up” is altogether speculative. Hedrick has to

¹³³ Hedrick also applies the affective fallacy to parable interpretation, again treating the parables as art (Many Things in Parables, 51-54).

¹³⁴ Ibid., 39.


¹³⁶ Hedrick acknowledges as much (Many Things in Parables, 36-38).
assign agency and even intent (it “deliberately conceals nothing”) to the parable. The parables are by no means self-evidently transparent. Indeed, a story designed to be symbolic will most likely not deal explicitly with the realities it is to represent: this would risk neutralizing the symbolism as symbolism. Hedrick speculates that the parables are “transparent,” but he presents his speculation as fact.

In short, Hedrick does not actually argue that parables “mean exactly what they say.” He presents parables as works of art characterized by a certain realism.

2.3.2 Hedrick’s Characterization of What Audiences Do

Despite his claim that “we simply do not know how Jesus used parables,” Hedrick’s pragmatic hypothesis is manifest in his construal of what audiences do. He writes:

The parables of Jesus are open-ended; they have no conclusions that tell readers how to react. Indeed, they seem designed to present readers with deliberate conundrums…. Readers make sense of a parable, or not, out of what they bring to it—just as Jesus’ first auditors were forced to do. The meaning of the parable is not inside the parable, but meaning is developed by readers who interact with the

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137 The ascription of agency to a text is a hindrance to critical discussion, yet Hedrick’s arguments are characterized again and again by agent-text formulations.

138 Indeed, Ricoeur claims that “The parable should be interpreted metaphorically because it pretends to be plain and trivial” (“Biblical Hermeneutics,” 98; emphasis original).

139 Hedrick reads The Prodigal Son as art characterized by realism. He describes the parable as “simply a tragic story of a dysfunctional family” and concludes (ibid., 40-42):

The story describes an indulgent parent who pampers his younger son and slight the older. Basically, the father has not treated both sons the same, and he has personally created the dynamic leading to the crisis with which the story leaves the reader: An irresponsible younger son returns to continued pampering by an overindulgent father, and a responsible older son is now alienated from both of them. An auditor/reader might well wonder how to situate himself or herself into the landscape of this rather depressing fictional story. All the characters are flawed, and the narrator gives no hint of a solution.
parable. The parable is not closed until the auditor/reader is drawn into it as participant. To give a parable an authoritative interpretation—to tell the reader how to “take it”—subverts the parable by closing off a reader’s participation and preventing the parable from witnessing in its own way to each reader.

The parables have the potential to work today just as they did for auditors in the first century, who made sense of them, or not, in terms of who they were and what they brought to the audition. The stories either resonated with first century auditors or not. “Resonance” describes the interaction of auditor and parable. It is a concept in phonetics (the science or study of speech sounds) and describes the prolongation of sound by reverberation and reflection—an amplification of the range of the audibility of sounds. Put another way, sound reverberates—and so do ideas and parables. When effective, artistic narrative works in a similar way. Parables resonate with readers whose engagement with the story provokes reflection. In this way, the parable raises for the reader awareness of issues not technically a part of the narrative. Put another way, the parable evokes issues for particular readers. Using still another image, the parable lifts the reader’s horizon of understanding; it raises the reader’s “range of vision” beyond the narrow limits of the story. The reader glimpses things suggested to that particular reader by the parable in the nexus between parable and reader—that is to say, in the reader’s reflection on the parable. In that nexus (i.e., in the reader’s mind reflecting on the story within the parable’s world) readers find affirmation, challenge, or subversion to the constructs under which they conduct their own lives. If effective, the parable suggests to them a broader vision of life’s possibilities, a different way of being in the world.

Parables, then, are “designed” to present conundrums and are “effective,” i.e., they achieve an end, when they “resonate” with a reader and ultimately broaden the reader’s “vision of life’s possibilities.” According to Hedrick, this is both how they worked for Jesus’s audiences and how they can work for audiences today. All in all this is a viable position, but it entails a pragmatic hypothesis: that Jesus intended the parables to be received in the manner described.

A final problem remains. Hedrick does not present a consistent notion of validity in a response. On the one hand, he seeks to empower readers themselves to engage the texts rather than to accept as the interpretation anyone else’s reading—particularly those of biblical scholars. Given his understanding of how parables work, firsthand engagement

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140 Ibid., 84-85; emphasis original.
is indispensable: the text must be allowed to resonate with the reader and thereby broaden the reader’s vision of life. Indeed, Hedrick sometimes adopts a subjectivist stance, defining “meaning” as “in the final analysis, a particular reader’s response to a given text.” On the other hand, he speaks of a range of “equally plausible explanations”; encourages readers to study the text in its historical context; and claims that the text provides “constraints” upon reading, as if some readings really are better than others.

Hedrick claims that “the parable can be the final authority for evaluating itself” in light of four constraints. The first two constraints are as follows: first, “The realism of the parable undermines any reading disregarding its realism, and exposes for what it is the idealism of readings of the parable deriving from another plane of reality”; and second, “the language used in the parable establishes the limits of its discourse with the reader.” The second amounts to a different version of the first constraint, preventing the reader from appealing to a second level of signification. These serve to invalidate figurative readings but depend upon the assumption that the texts are self-evidently transparent, which they are not.

The third is not a constraint arising from the text itself: “The parable is only interested in the social world of village life in Palestinian Judaism.” So Hedrick again

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141 Ibid., 46. Already in his second chapter Hedrick claims that “a work of art, once completed, is independent of its creator’s intention, and, in the final analysis, people evaluate it on the basis of their own experience” (13). The title of his concluding section is, “Every Interpretation of a Parable is a Particular Reader’s Response” (102-4).

142 Ibid., 45, 89-95.

143 Ibid., 53.

144 Ibid.
ascribes agency to the parable. Granted, the parable originated in a certain historical setting and arguments can be made for taking this context into account when reading the parable. But this is not a textual constraint whereby the text is “the final authority for evaluating itself.” The fourth “constraint” is especially revealing: “The openness of the story invites the engagement of all readers”; the fourth “constraint,” then, is the “openness” of the text.145

The questions I have raised notwithstanding, Hedrick clearly seeks a substantive understanding of reception activity. He portrays reception activity in terms of a text “resonating” with a reader/hearer at a personal level. He considers this open-ended

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145 Ibid. Hedrick further muddies the waters when he discusses polyvalency and the affective fallacy. He claims that parable texts, and narrative texts generally, are polyvalent and that polyvalence and ambiguity “essentially mean the same thing.” But then he defines polyvalence in terms of ambiguity: polyvalence is “an innate ambiguity found in all narrative, a feature facilitating multiple responses (or meanings) from readers” (13, 47-48). He goes on to say that “ambiguity” is “created by the instability of words and gaps in a narrative” (47), which makes a certain amount of sense, but then he also claims that “even texts without gaps are polyvalent” (49).

Elsewhere, Hedrick appeals to the New Criticism’s affective fallacy, which according to his interpretation cautions readers “not to assume that their interpretations of a parable accurately describe the character of a parable” (51). But his example of the affective fallacy is surely counterproductive. He recounts that he wrote a poem that he says he intended to be about “the annual assault of dandelions in middle-class American lawns in the heart of the summer.” He has his classes read this poem and many students claim that there is an erotic theme in the poem. While Hedrick does not believe that his intentions should govern the meaning, he claims that his students’ perception of an erotic theme in the poem exemplifies the affective fallacy: “[R]eaders who find the poem erotic are basing this judgment on how it affects them, rather than on the poem itself.” But this is not necessarily true. The students in fact argue from the text of the poem: not only is the word “erotically” afforded its own line, but there are also several other words that the students point to as having an erotic connotation: “erect,” “shimmying,” “steamy,” “rigid,” “penile,” “thrusting,” “exploding wave,” “flaccid,” and “aureole”—the poem itself is less than a hundred words (52-53). Indeed, the students seem to perform a rather competent New-Critic-style close reading of the poem and they find that, in light of the many words suggestive of eroticism—by standard cultural usage, even dictionary definition, not idiosyncratic association—there is an erotic theme. Hedrick’s example of the affective fallacy is therefore another instance of him not stating clearly how meaning involves both the text and the audience.
process to be essential to what parables are and so champions firsthand engagement with the texts. Indeed, though I proceed rather differently, much of what I will argue concerning reception activity is anticipated by Hedrick’s study.

3. Parables and Dialogue

In this final section, I wish to consider briefly the notion that parable reception may involve engagement with other readers or hearers, that is, already implicitly acknowledging the validity of multiple interpretations. Indeed, it is becoming increasingly common to introduce readings/interpretations with modesty, as in the following examples:

1. Scott (1989) gives “A Reading,” not the reading, of each parable;\(^{146}\)

2. Wright (2000) situates his work in the history of parable studies, noting, “I will present my own proposals as one turn the story might take next (rather than as the closure or climax of the story)”;\(^{147}\)

3. Mary Ann Beavis (2002) writes of her treatment of The Prodigal Son, “The interpretation that follows does not purport to uncover the ‘true’ or ‘original’ meaning of the parable…. It attempts to read the parable from the perspective of an implied reader with the life experience of one of the runaways described above”;\(^{148}\) and

4. Amy-Jill Levine (2014) claims, “I am not seeking to replace the readings that Matthew, Mark, and Luke, or Augustine, or John Wesley, or the local homilist proclaims. I am rather seeking to add one more layer.”\(^{149}\)

\(^{146}\) As Hedrick points out (Many Things in Parables, 46).

\(^{147}\) Wright, Voice of Jesus, 2.

\(^{148}\) Beavis, “‘Making Up Stories’: A Feminist Reading of the Parable of the Prodigal Son (Lk. 15.11b-32),” in The Lost Coin: Parables of Women, Work, and Wisdom, ed. idem, BibSem (London: Continuum, 2002), 103. Here “implied reader” seems to mean hypothetical reader.

\(^{149}\) Levine, Short Stories by Jesus, 20.
These statements suggest that those studying the parables today find themselves entering a community of readers. To study the parables is to join a “dialogue,” as David B. Gowler (2017) puts it:

[Parables] can be deceptively complex, enigmatic, dialogic—drawing listeners and readers into continuing conversations…. These dialogues developed in ever-expanding circles as these stories have been told and retold, read and reread, over the centuries, dialogues that, I argue, deepen and enrich our understandings of what Jesus’s parables denote and connote…. [T]he responses to Jesus’s parables are not limited to texts or speech; they include music, visual art, poetry, and other modes of interpretation in new contexts. Thus interpreters, ancient and modern, participate in the formation of meaning, and any interpretation of Jesus’s parables is incomplete if it does not incorporate the responses of those interpreters who have preceded us.150

Herzog connects parables to dialogue in a different way. According to him the parables are “discussion starters.”151 Jesus, a “pedagogue of the oppressed” à la Paulo Freire, aims to transform the oppressed into “subjects capable of making history by

150 Gowler, The Parables after Jesus: Their Imaginative Receptions across Two Millennia (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 1-2. Wright finds it necessary to attempt “to hear what others have heard” in the parables (Voice of Jesus, 3). Lischer likewise observes, “When we read the Scripture, we are joining a conversation that has been going on a long time. The key to our participation is knowing as much as possible about the dialogue that has preceded us” (Reading the Parables, 165).

The call to hearing others is by no means universal, however. For example, James Breech argues just the opposite (The Silence of Jesus: The Authentic Voice of the Historical Man [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983], 4-5):

Once, while I was at Princeton, I went to hear W. H. Auden read some of his latest poetry. The lecture hall was jammed with hundreds of people, all of whom were very animated with expectation. Auden read in a voice so still that almost at once people began trying to repeat to each other what they thought he had said, and in almost no time it was impossible for those at any distance from the podium to hear any but intermediary voices….

If we want to hear what a speaker is saying while others are talking, even though they are trying to be helpful, their voices distract our attention and interfere with our listening. In order for the speaker’s own voice to be heard, the go-betweens must be silent.

151 Herzog, Parables as Subversive Speech, 259.
remaking their society.” Parables, codifications as it were of Freire’s program, “objectify conditions of oppression so that they can be examined.” This examination proceeds by way of dialogue; as Herzog puts it, “[the parables] re-present a familiar or typified scene for the purpose of generating conversation about it and stimulating the kinds of reflection that expose contradictions in popularly held beliefs or traditional thinking.”

Most important here is the notion that the parable teller wants an active, probing audience rather than a passive, merely receptive one. Crossan captures this:

The pedagogical ethic of a Jesus or a Freire intends a generative and transformative raising of consciousness so that “mystified illiterates became critical-thinking readers of their world.” That also means, of course, that the parabler has ceded control to the parabled. It is they who must debate message and meaning, argue interpretation and implication, and only their silence is the parable’s failure.

The parbler presents the parable to the audience… and retreats, deliberately relinquishes authority. Those in the audience are not being told something; they are being authorized by the author to explore the parable in dialogue with one another.

While Gowler suggests a continuous conversation from the first century to today, Herzog does not. Rather, “the study of Jesus’ parables becomes a prelude to a larger task. We must learn to tell new parables that codify and problematize our world as well as Jesus told parables for his world.” Herzog presents the parables as first-century

\[152\] Ibid., 22.

\[153\] Ibid., 26.


\[155\] Herzog, Parables as Subversive Speech, 265.
discussion starters designed by the author to turn the oppressed into “agents of humanization in a dehumanizing society.” For Gowler, in contrast, dialogue has become practically inescapable for audiences today given the extensive history of response, and dialogue is beneficial because the perspective of any one individual is supplemented with those of others. But dialogue is not necessarily intended by the author. Indeed, uncertainty about the author’s intention fuels much of the dialogue.

In either case, reception activity involves some kind of discussion with other receivers. Most today agree: parables are not for individuals to receive alone.

4. Conclusion

Parable studies always involve notions of reception activity. Though reflecting a diversity of parable theory—parable as situation-dependent argument (Linnemann), metaphoric narrative (Scott), and allegory (Blomberg)—studies aiming to re-present the parables in their historical context have presupposed various acts, e.g., inferencing, judging, expecting, identifying with. Reception activity is largely taken for granted—it is not brought into critical consciousness.

On the other hand, studies seeking the meaning/significance/relevance of parables for modern-day audiences, that is, those re-presenting the parables as art, deal more substantially with notions of reception activity, but only select aspects in any given study. As we have seen, Jones reveals something of the imaginative and experiential depth of what audiences do. Via distinguishes from nonaesthetic reception a notion of aesthetic reception in which the audience’s attention on the object is maintained and the whole

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156 Ibid., 22.

157 This distinction between Herzog and others is not always drawn clearly, e.g., in Zimmermann, Puzzling the Parables, 147-48, 178.
person is somehow involved. Wittig contemplates the value of the performance of the various acts of structuration in which personal resources are drawn upon to make sense of a text. Tolbert describes a “personal dimension” that influences the reader’s interpretation of a text as well as techniques readers can learn to limit this influence. Hedrick encourages readers to engage texts firsthand so that the parables might “resonate” with them in a personal way and so broaden their sense of life’s possibilities.

In this chapter, I have attempted to show that parable study inevitably involves reception activity, and that the particular notion of reception activity operative in any given study affects the investigation and its outcome. Yet parable studies—and biblical studies generally—lacks a concrete, holistic, critical conception of reception activity. In the next chapter, then, I step away from the parables for a moment. I present a comprehensive vision of reception activity: an Envisionment-Development Model of Reading (EDMR). EDMR in hand, I will return to the parables in Chapters 3-5.
CHAPTER 2

AN ENVISIONMENT-DEVELOPMENT MODEL OF READING

There has been a great deal of interest in reading in recent decades. Education theorists in dialogue with various schools of psychology and social science have sought better to understand everything from childhood literacy to college-level literary appreciation.¹ Cognitive psychologists have refined theories of text comprehension through empirical testing.² In the 1960s–1980s, literary theorists, now commonly

¹ Patricia A. Alexander and Emily Fox divide the history of education-oriented reading research into the following six periods (“A Historical Perspective on Reading Research and Practice, Redux,” in Theoretical Models and Processes of Reading, 6th ed., ed. Donna E. Alvermann, Norman J. Unrau, and Robert B. Ruddell [Newark, DE: International Reading Association, 2013], 3-46):

2. “The Era of Natural Learning (1966–1975),” in which principles from Chomskian linguistics predominate—particularly the idea that the development of language proficiency, spoken and written, is best facilitated through the “meaningful use” of language capacities rather than behaviorist-style conditioning;
3. “The Era of Information Processing (1976–1985),” in which the mind-as-computer metaphor then popular in cognitive psychology informs investigations of the use of prior knowledge in text comprehension;
4. “The Era of Sociocultural Learning (1986–1995),” in which theories from social and cultural anthropology bring to light the ways that social contexts privilege/authorize certain “ways of knowing” rather than others;
5. “The Era of Engaged Learning (1996–2005),” in which theory on motivation and human affect illuminate the ways that people learn from texts; and
6. “The Emergent Era of Goal-Directed Learning (2006–[2013]),” in which, in response to the previous era’s sometimes exaggerated claims about affect, there is renewed interest in the reader’s critical capacities.

In short, “Over the past 60 years, those considered to be among the leading reading researchers have ranged from reading specialists to psycholinguists, from literature researchers to cognitive scientists, and from special educators to generative grammarians” (32-33).

² I describe the conception of comprehension presented in cognitive psychology below (Ch. 2:1).
identified as “reader response critics,” made diverse appeals to the activities of readers.³

Moreover, in the 1990s a new type of literary inquiry emerged, “cognitive literary studies,” in which conceptualizations from cognitive psychology are employed to

³ Although reader activity was studied in the 1930s by I. A. Richards (Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment [London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1930]) and Louise M. Rosenblatt (Literature as Exploration, 5th ed. [New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1995 (1938)]), in the mid-1900s literary theory was dominated by formalist notions of an autonomous text (in America, the New Criticism). In a reactionary swing, critics in the 1960s–1980s turned their attention to reading and readers. Reader response criticism is unified in its interest in reading but little else.

Steven Mailloux divides reader response criticism into subjective, interactionist, and social types (Interpretive Conventions: The Reader in the Study of American Fiction [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982], 19-64):

1. Norman Holland (5 Readers Reading [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975]) and David Bleich (Subjective Criticism [Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1978]) present reading as a subjective affair and draw on psychoanalytic thought;


investigate literary experience.¹ In this chapter I draw on these different domains—
education theory, cognitive psychology, reader response studies, and cognitive literary
studies—to produce a critical conception of reading serviceable to biblical studies.

To begin, I summarize the standard cognitive account of “comprehension”
(Section 1). This account is important for two reasons. First, it is a concrete, precise,
empirically validated description of one type of reading activity, comprehension. Second,
cognitive psychology presents “comprehension” as the progressive construction of a
mental text representation. This notion of progressive construction is central to the more
expansive account of reading that I develop.

Ultimately, cognitive views of “comprehension” are too narrow in scope for
present purposes. I turn, then, to Louise M. Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading
to sketch a broader account (Section 2). Rosenblatt understands instances of reading—
especially what she calls “aesthetic reading”—as singular events in which there is always

¹ “Cognitive literary studies,” much like “reader response criticism,” is an
umbrella term for an array of approaches. Alan Richardson characterizes it loosely as
“the work of literary critics and theorists vitally interested in cognitive science and
neuroscience” (“Studies in Literature and Cognition: A Field Map,” in The Work of
Fiction: Cognition, Culture, and Complexity, ed. Alan Richardson and Ellen Spolsky
[London: Routledge, 2017], 2). Richardson surveys the field in terms of six categories,
three of which are particularly relevant, as follows (ibid., 1-29):
1. “Cognitive Poetics,” which draws on empirical investigations of “literariness” and
   adapts cognitive models for the description of reception processes;
2. “Cognitive Narratology,” which analyzes narrative discourse in terms of how it
   anticipates cognitive processing; and
3. “Cognitive Esthetics of Reception,” which explores the role of imagination in
   reading in dialogue with cognitive accounts of perception and imagination.
The other three areas are “Cognitive Rhetoric and Conceptual Blending Theory,”
“Evolutionary Literary Theory,” and “Cognitive Materialism and Historicism.”
Cognitive literary studies rarely seek novel interpretations of texts; rather, as
Marco Caracciolo argues in his defense of cognitive literary studies, they aim to enrich
conceptions of the literary enterprise through the investigation of the processes involved
in encounters with texts (“Cognitive Literary Studies and the Status of Interpretation: An
a particular reader equipped with various knowledge, capacities, interests, etc., in a particular situation performing a variety of activities to receive a particular text.

Rosenblatt’s theory is extensive but lacks precision. She is reluctant to identify and relate very exactly the phenomena involved—cautious to avoid simplification.

In my view, however, it is possible to describe reading more rigorously without being reductive. Hence I present what I call an Envisionment-Development Model of Reading (EDMR) (Section 3). EDMR is an expansion of cognitive accounts and a consolidation of Rosenblatt’s theory. It is a reasonably comprehensive description of reading serviceable to parable studies and biblical studies generally. To avoid redundancy, I postpone description of the model until Section 3 of the present discussion, where it is fully explicated.


Whatever else might be involved, reading is first of all the reader’s performance of comprehension activities. The most thorough accounts of comprehension are those developed in cognitive psychology.⁵ In cognitive psychology “reading” is studied in

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⁵ Cognitive psychologists have produced many descriptions of comprehension that are not altogether compatible. However, in the summary that follows I describe only what is typical in these accounts, “the fundamentals.” Standard surveys of research on comprehension in cognitive psychology include Trevor A. Harley, *The Psychology of Language: From Data to Theory*, 4th ed. (New York: Psychology, 2014), 360-92; Michael W. Eysenck and Mark T. Keane, *Cognitive Psychology: A Student’s Handbook*, 7th ed. (New York: Psychology, 2015), 403-50.

terms of “lower-level processes” and “higher-level processes.” Lower-level processes are those cognitive activities involved in such things as decoding words and parsing sentences. Assuming proficient or better readers for whom these processes are routine and reliable, there is no need here for further discussion of lower-level processes.\(^6\) Higher-level processes are those involved in the comprehension of *discourses*, that is, unified texts at least several sentences in length. In cognitive theories of higher-level processes, “to comprehend a text” means to *construct* a coherent *mental representation* of the text with substantial use of *prior knowledge*. Construction, mental representation, prior knowledge—I shall discuss these three in turn.

1.1 The Cycle-by-Cycle Construction Process

Fundamental in cognitive psychology is a distinction between *working memory* and *long-term memory*. *Working memory* refers to a person’s capacity for active thought; *long-term memory* is a storehouse into which information is encoded and from which information can be retrieved—that is, made active in working memory.\(^7\) Key to theories of comprehension is the fact that working memory has a limited capacity whereas long-term memory is practically limitless.

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\(^6\) Harley treats lower-level processes extensively (*Psychology of Language*, 165-359).

\(^7\) Though crude, these definitions suffice for present purposes. Eysenck and Keane review theories of memory (*Cognitive Psychology*, 207-344).
Since working memory is limited, the mind can only process so much information at a time. Discourses—by definition, several sentences in length—are too long to be processed by working memory all at once. Consequently, it is theorized that comprehension proceeds in a series of cycles and each cycle revolves around the processing of one small text chunk, a focal statement about the size of a clause.

Receiving the first chunk, the reader begins the development of a mental representation. Of this representation, some is encoded into long-term memory (where it is not immediately available for further processing) and some is kept active in working memory (where it is available for further processing). Each subsequent chunk enters working memory and is mapped onto—integrated into—the representation. The reader continues cycle by cycle to the end of the text. Individuals differ, of course, in terms of working-memory capacity, and these differences no doubt affect their acts of comprehension.\(^8\)

1.2 The Mental Representation

Cycle by cycle readers construct a mental text representation. Cognitive psychologists describe text representations in terms of three levels: surface code, textbase (variously: text base, text-base), and situation model. The surface code representation reflects the exact wording and phrasing of a text; absent any special effort on the part of the reader to attend to these, surface code traces decay (are forgotten) rapidly.

The textbase representation refers to a gist-level understanding that arises from very minimal processing of explicit text statements. More exactly, the reader construes

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text statements without making any but the simplest of inferences. A reader with only a textbase representation has in mind a loose collection of propositions.  

The *situation model* is a representation of the states and changes of affairs referred to in a text. Importantly, as its name suggests the situation model is a mental model, not a collection of propositions. As models, they may involve diagrammatic visuals, fleshed out imaginative renderings, as well as auditory and other non-visuospatial elements. As a theoretical construct, the “situation model” is exceptionally important; among other things, the construct accounts for the mind’s ability to integrate information from multiple sources and across modalities.

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9 The notion of a textbase level of representation is integral to Kintsch’s Construction-Integration Model of text comprehension which is foundational in the field of discourse processing. However, the idea of a textbase is coming to be obsolete (Kintsch, “Revisiting the Construction-Integration Model,” 809-20). A strength of Kintsch’s model is that textbase-level comprehension is described in terms of a computational system; this allows the model to make exacting predictions about the textbase-level comprehensibility of a given text. Computational models are typical in cognitive psychology (Eysenck and Keane, *Cognitive Psychology*, 23-29).


11 For example, at the time of this writing (2018) I have been reading news reports on Special Counsel Robert Mueller’s investigation concerning interference in the 2016 US presidential election. At this point, with few exceptions, I do not remember the specific articles that I have read, let alone the exact wording of the articles, but I have developed an understanding of the states and changes of affairs in the investigation. I have formed a *Mueller investigation situation model* by integrating information from many texts. Moreover, I have not only read articles but also watched televised reports and heard about developments from friends, all of which has contributed to my model. The situation model construct accounts for this sort of integration (Zwaan and Radvansky, “Situation Models,” 163-65). I have modeled this example after Zwaan’s Gulf Crisis example (*Aspects of Literary Comprehension: A Cognitive Approach*, Utrecht Publications in General and Comparative Literature [Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1993], 29-30).
To construct a situation model, the reader has to draw on prior knowledge. But before moving on to prior knowledge, it is important to consider three things concerning mental representations. First, none of the three levels described above accounts for a reader’s developing sense of the communicative situation between the author and the reader, e.g., the role of such things as a reader’s “author representations” in discourse comprehension. There must be a fourth level of representation, a *pragmatic model*, that readers develop during comprehension.12

Second, while the three, indeed four, levels are distinguishable, they are interconnected and mutually conditioning in ways not well described in cognitive theories.13

Finally, the mental representation may be understood to have a structure of its own in which some things are central and others by degree peripheral.14

1.3 The Reader’s Prior Knowledge

To construct a situation model the reader draws on her prior knowledge. Readers use prior knowledge by making *inferences* and through the activation of memory *schemas*. An inference is the deriving, or perhaps better determination, of additional information from what is already known or believed.15 Readers vary, of course, in terms of their *inferencing skills*.16

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12 Graesser, Millis, and Zwaan acknowledge the existence of this sort of level and the need for further investigation (“Discourse Comprehension,” 167-68).

13 Ibid., 168.

14 Van den Broek, Mouw, and Kraal, “Individual Differences in Reading, 139.

15 This is a slight modification of Harley’s definition: “An inference is the derivation of additional knowledge from facts already known” (Psychology of Language,
It is sometimes useful to describe inferences according to the kind of information being inferred, e.g., causes, character motives, character goals, instruments employed.\textsuperscript{17} But at a more fundamental level inferences differ according to the following: the category of knowledge involved; the necessity of the inference for coherence; and the effort required to make the inference.

1.3.1 Inferences: Categories of Knowledge Involved

In all but the simplest cases, to make an inference the reader must draw on prior knowledge.\textsuperscript{18} It is helpful to distinguish between four types of knowledge: world knowledge, domain knowledge, personal knowledge, and text knowledge. World knowledge includes those things that—in a given culture—most people would be expected to know. Domain knowledge, in contrast, refers to competence in a specific area.
developed beyond what is typical of a general population.\textsuperscript{19} Personal knowledge includes episodic memories and refers to knowledge of particulars, e.g., specific people, specific events. And text knowledge includes what is known about the text at hand—especially whatever has already been comprehended. In short, inferences may involve the reader’s world knowledge, domain knowledge, specific knowledge, text knowledge or some combination of the four.\textsuperscript{20}

1.3.2 Necessary Inferences and Elaborative Inferences

Some inferences are more necessary for maintaining the \textit{coherence} of the developing mental representation whereas others are elaborative. In cognitive accounts, the term \textit{coherence} applies primarily to the reader’s mental representation; it does not apply to the text.\textsuperscript{21} There are two types of coherence, local coherence and global coherence. In a given cycle of processing, when the focal statement (the incoming textual material) readily maps onto the part of the text representation that is active in working memory, then local coherence is achieved. On the other hand, the reader achieves global coherence when the focal statement is integrated with, or at least not taken to be incompatible with, the bulk of the text representation residing in long-term memory. At each cycle, the reader attempts to maintain the coherence of the representation. Necessary inferences are those required for coherence maintenance when the focal statement does not readily map onto the current representation. For various reasons, readers may make

\textsuperscript{19} E.g., the legal expert reading about Special Counsel Mueller’s investigation is equipped to make inferences that would never occur to me, a nonexpert.

\textsuperscript{20} “Knowledge” in this context does not imply facticity. I am simply referring to memory content.

\textsuperscript{21} In contrast, the term \textit{cohesion} applies to texts.
inferences that are not necessary for maintaining coherence; these inferences are called *elaborative inferences*.

1.3.3 Automatic Inferences and Effortful Inferences

The reader makes some inferences automatically during the flow of reading but draws others with effort during a pause. To make an *automatic inference* is to construe a text statement by means of prior knowledge without exerting any effort—without trying to do so. To put it another way, inferences are made automatically when the reader’s processing of a text statement causes *passive activation* of prior knowledge which then factors into what is ultimately encoded in the text representation. Despite the term’s paradoxical sound, *passive activation* is critical. Passive activation takes place when the presence of information in working memory causes the generation of a signal that spreads through the network of long-term memory and, over the course of the spreading, causes related information to become available in working memory, i.e., activates it.\(^{22}\) Readers regularly make automatic inferences during discourse comprehension. They come about instantly and do not interrupt the flow of reading.

By contrast, some inferences require an effortful, sometimes called “strategic,” process. In such cases, the reader stops the flow of reading, consciously searches


A great deal of what readers do is automatized. In commonsense understandings, readers are sometimes assumed to be passive with respect to texts. This is not the case—or, at the very least, not a helpful way of perceiving the matter. Readers may be “passive,” but only with respect to their own automatic acts. Even when acts are automatic, readers are still active with respect to the text. By automatic acts much is done to construe a text though the reader may believe she has done nothing.
memory, and marshals prior knowledge to bring it to bear on the text at hand. In theory, any sort of inference can potentially come about automatically or require the reader’s effort depending on the text and the reader’s knowledge, competencies, and goals.\(^\text{23}\)

1.3.4 Schemas

In addition to inferencing, readers use prior knowledge when memory *schemas* are activated. In memory, knowledge is networked together. There are arrangements wherein relatively discrete bits are maintained in relationship. Thus there are complex memory units, or *schemas*.\(^\text{24}\) Activate a constituent of a schema and the whole complex is activated.

Exactly how the schema construct applies to memory organization is not relevant for present purposes but rather the ways in which activated schemas influence comprehension. Reading the following two sets of sentences may serve as an example:

\begin{enumerate}
\item[(1)] *Luke tasted the soup and decided it needed more time.*
\item[(2a)] *He went back to his computer to finish the article he was reading.*
\end{enumerate}

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\(^\text{24}\) There are many similar but different “schema” concepts in the term’s long history. I am working with the concept at a general enough level that much of the possible nuance is not significant. Vanessa E. Ghosh and Asaf Gilboa review the term’s usage and attempt to establish a core meaning of “schema” (“What is a Memory Schema? A Historical Perspective on Current Neuroscience Literature,” *Neuropsychologia* 53 [2014]: 104-14). Richard C. Anderson wrote a brief introduction to “schema” back in 1984, at a time when the construct was taking on a dominate role in theories of discourse comprehension (“Role of the Reader’s Schema in Comprehension, Learning, and Memory,” in Alvermann, Unrau, and Ruddell, *Theoretical Models*, 476-88). “Schema” constructs are often employed in cognitive literary studies. Elena Semino (*Language and World Creation in Poems and Other Texts*, Textual Explorations [London: Routledge, 1997], 119-59) and Peter Stockwell (*Cognitive Poetics: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. [London: Routledge, 2020], 102-18) introduce the idea in accessible terms.
(1) Luke tasted the soup and decided it needed more time.  
(2b) A server added another slip to the growing line of tickets.

Even though there is no explicit statement of the setting, readers probably understand the first set of sentences as referring to a domestic situation (Luke is at home making soup) and the second set of sentences as referring to a commercial situation (Luke is working in a restaurant). Moreover, the reader who typically cooks soup in domestic settings may locate Luke in such a setting just from reading statement 1—her understanding will be validated or invalidated by statement 2a or 2b. Likewise, the reader who typically cooks soup in commercial settings may locate Luke in a restaurant kitchen prior to reading either 2a or 2b. Readers thus construe statements by way of their activated schematic knowledge.

Schemas are important for comprehension in several ways. First, they are activated automatically so that the reader potentially adds a lot to the text without necessarily realizing it. Second, an activated schema facilitates subsequent comprehension: it provides generic scaffolding—a template, as it were—that the reader will develop into a specific situation model if given additional text statements. For example, I locate Luke in a largely detail-less kitchen, but I am ready to envision this kitchen and this episode of cooking in exact, concrete ways as the text provides information.25 Third, activated schemas may actually impede comprehension. If an

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25 Zwaan and Radvansky, “Situation Models,” 162. This property of schemas is related to the broader idea that readers follow “the principle of minimal departure” during comprehension (Marie-Laure Ryan, “Fiction, Non-Factuals, and the Principle of Minimal Departure,” Poetics 9 [1980]: 406). According to this principle,  
[W]e reconstrue the world of a fiction and of a counterfactual as being the closest possible to the reality we know. This means that we will project upon the world of the statement everything we know about the real world, and that we will make only those adjustments which we cannot avoid. For instance, if somebody says:
inappropriate schema is activated, comprehension may be warped as text information is fitted into an unsuitable frame. Finally, in some cases texts can be practically incomprehensible to the reader who lacks the requisite schemas. This may be either because the author left too much unstated in the text—having presumed that the audience will possess the requisite schematic knowledge—or because the author designed the text to achieve an effect on the reader by activating but then frustrating schematic knowledge.

1.4 The Fundamentals in Sum

Figure 1, appended to this chapter, diagrams the rudiments of discourse processing as described in cognitive psychology—a Rudimentary Cognitive Model (RCM). From a given text, a focal statement is taken into (the limited-capacity) working memory (via lower-level comprehension processes). This focal statement is then mapped onto/integrated with the portion of the text representation active in working memory. The text representation consists of interrelated information, specifically, surface code information (capturing exact wording), textbase information (capturing the gist of the text in propositional form), a situation model (a multimodal rendering of the states and changes of affairs conveyed by the text), and a pragmatic model (reflecting the social, communicative dimension of the text). During mapping/integration, the reader sometimes makes inferences, i.e., the reader mobilizes prior knowledge (world, domain, personal, or text) from long-term memory (either through an effortful search or the automatic spread of a signal) and brings this knowledge to bear on the comprehension of the focal

“If horses had wings they would be able to fly,” we reconstrue an animal presenting all the properties of real horses, but which, in addition, has wings and is able to fly. We perform the same operation when we read in a fairy tale about a flying horse, when a child tells us “Last night I dreamed about a flying horse,” and when a poet writes a sonnet about riding the flying horse of imagination.
statement (for the sake of coherence or elaboration). Moreover, the comprehension of text statements automatically activates schemas that act as generic scaffolding for the development of the situation model and thereby facilitate subsequent comprehension. The reader constructs a text representation through statement-by-statement integration until completion.

2. Reading as a Transaction

Accounts of comprehension developed in cognitive psychology are detailed and systematic but narrow in scope. Of course, reading is more than text comprehension. I turn now, then, to Louise M. Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading to consider what other sorts of things need to be accounted for in a more comprehensive description of reading. Rosenblatt argues that reading is a “transaction,” “an ongoing process in which the elements or factors are … aspects of a total situation, each conditioned by and conditioning the other.” As such, reading potentially involves many and various types of activity and thus many and various reader capacities.

In what Rosenblatt calls “aesthetic” reading, the transaction consists of a particular reader evoking a “poem” through an encounter with a particular “text” in the context of a particular situation. In Rosenblatt’s terms, a “text” is “a set or series of signs interpretable as linguistic symbols.” A “poem,” in contrast, is an internal rendering produced by the reader in her reception of the text. “Poem” is thus similar to the “text


27 Rosenblatt, Reader, 12.
representation” construct of cognitive accounts, but it is more expansive and is situated within a more holistic vision of reading. Rosenblatt writes:

> The poem … must be thought of as an event in time. It is not an object or an ideal entity. It happens during a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text. The reader brings to the text his past experience and present personality. Under the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, he marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, which he sees as the poem. This becomes part of the ongoing stream of his life experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being. ²⁸

Rosenblatt describes the transactional event, the situation of the reader with text in hand, in terms of a “live circuit”:

> “The poem” comes into being in the live circuit set up between the reader and “the text.” As with the elements of an electric circuit, each component of the reading process functions by virtue of the presence of others. A specific reader and a specific text at a specific time and place: change any of these, and there occurs a different circuit, a different event—a different poem. The reader focuses his attention on the symbols and on what they help to crystallize out into awareness. Not the words, as uttered sounds or inked marks on a page, constitute the poem, but the structured responses to them. For the reader, the poem is lived through during his intercourse with the text. ²⁹

Across The Reader, the Text, the Poem—the most thorough presentation of her theory—Rosenblatt refers to four dimensions of reading activity:

1. readers govern their attention in particular ways; they adopt a “stance” (22-47);

2. readers generate and synthesize various mental phenomena as they receive the text; they “evoke the poem” (48-70);

3. readers constantly generate mental responses to what they are synthesizing; they produce “[a] concurrent stream of feelings, attitudes, and ideas” (48-70); and

²⁸ Ibid. According to Rosenblatt, “‘The poem’ seen as an event in the life of a reader, as embodied in a process resulting from the confluence of reader and text, should be central to a systematic theory of literature” (ibid., 16; emphasis added).

²⁹ Ibid., 14.
4. Readers may subsequently consider and put into words their experience with the text; they participate in “interpretation,” “evaluation,” and “criticism” (131-75).

So Rosenblatt describes reading in terms of four principal constituents—reader, text, situation, and emerging “poem”—and four types of activity: governing attention, generating and synthesizing mental phenomena, internally responding to what’s being generated, and subsequently articulating the experience.

Rosenblatt describes reading as a transaction in which the factors “[are] each conditioned by and conditioning the other.” By this she cannot mean, of course, that a reader’s internal production somehow physically alters the text. Rather, I take her to mean three things. First, the many activities of the reader as well as the given states of the “poem” being produced mutually condition one another and constantly qualify the reception of the inked marks. Second, the reader performs the activities in accordance with her knowledge, capacities, interests, etc., and the reader herself is subject to change because of the performance. Third, the situation influences the way in which the reader reads; in her earlier work, Literature as Exploration, Rosenblatt encourages English teachers to create situations that will prompt students to adopt an aesthetic stance when reading literary works.

Interpreted in this way, Rosenblatt’s theory can be taken as an outline for developing a more thoroughly articulated model of reading. I turn now to the description of such a model.

3. An Envisionment-Development Model of Reading (EDMR)

According to the Envisionment-Development Model of Reading (EDMR), reading consists of the concurrent and successive performance of different classes of activity. Through these activities the reader progressively creates, develops, a network of
different types of mental impressions and understandings that are all associated with the text—a network that I call the reader’s *envisionment*.  

Figure 2, appended to this chapter, depicts EDMR. EDMR describes three primary classes of envisionment-formative activity, as follows:

1. *comprehension*, which is text-directed (Section 3.1);

2. *engagement*, which is envisionment-directed (Section 3.2); and

3. *extratextual accrual*, which is directed toward phenomena made available by the *situation* (Section 3.3).

The reader regulates these envisionment-formative activities through a superordinate class of management activities (Section 3.4). The reader performs three sorts of management activities. She forms an intention, in part through her *task-perception*, which depends upon her *situation*. She adopts standards and *modulates* the primary envisionment-formative activities to generate an envisionment that meets these standards. And she *monitors* the quality of the emerging envisionment. EDMR also includes a secondary envisionment-formative activity, the *usage* of the envisionment (Section 3.5).

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30 What I call an “envisionment” is similar to what cognitive psychologists designate as “text representations” and Rosenblatt calls the “poem”—but the notion is not synonymous with either of these. Though I develop the term in my own way, I adopt “envisionment” from Judith A. Langer (“The Process of Understanding: Reading for Literary and Informative Purposes,” *Research in the Teaching of English* 24 [1990]: 229-60). Langer describes “envisionment” as a mental reality that is developed by a reader over the course of reading and even after (231-32):

At any point in a reading, the individual has a local envisionment, a personal text-world embodying all she or he understands, assumes, or imagines up to that point in the reading…. However, this is momentary—subject to change in response to subsequent thoughts that may be (but are not necessarily) text-based. The final envisionment, then, is never the sum of previous traces, but is instead an evolving whole, which itself is subject to change well after the pages have been removed from sight.

Iser similarly understands reading in terms of generating mental “realizations” or “concretizations” of the text (*Act of Reading*, 21).
Even though it is not technically “reading,” I include usage in the model because it may have substantial repercussions on the envisionment, and acts of usage are often interwoven with the primary envisionment-formative activities.

In what follows I define a wide variety of reading acts. The specification of reading acts allows both for the specification of reader aspects that underlie the acts and the specification of the envisionment constituents formed through the acts. For example, a reader may judge various storyworld phenomena—that a character makes a good or bad decision, for instance. The reader makes judgments in accordance with her underlying world standards. By making the judgment she not only alters the progression of her envisionment formation, she also may maintain an impression of the judgment in her envisionment, a storyworld judgment. Table 1, appended to this chapter, maps all the reading acts, reader aspects, and envisionment constituents that I describe as well as select aspects of reading situations.

3.1 Comprehension

Comprehension as described in cognitive accounts is incorporated into EDMR but as one class of envisionment-formative activity alongside others. In this section I expand upon two matters, namely, the integration of focal statements and the use of imagination. But first it is helpful to replace “four levels of text representation” terminology of cognitive accounts with terms more serviceable to this study.

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31 Rosenblatt treats comprehension-type activity in a way not inconsistent with cognitive accounts in her discussion of “evoking the poem” (Reader, 48-70): she describes a synthesizing process aimed at coherence (50-62). Iser presents a similar view, especially with respect to the cycle-by-cycle process (Act of Reading, 109-10). He draws on Frank Smith, Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971).
I propose that readers generate three types of representation through acts of comprehension, as follows:

1. *storyworld representations*, capturing the narrative world—the characters, events, etc. (roughly equivalent to the “situation model” of cognitive accounts);

2. *artifact representations*, capturing the social dimensions of the text—its authoring, reception, and status in society (roughly equivalent to the “pragmatic model” of cognitive accounts);\(^{32}\) and

3. *composition representations*, capturing the craftwork detectable in the text, e.g., style, plotting (this is related to both the “surface code” and the “pragmatic model” of cognitive accounts).

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\(^{32}\) I mentioned above (Ch. 2:1.2) that cognitive scientists grant the existence of a pragmatic level of text representation that deals with the perceived communicative situation between author and reader. It seems to be the case that readers often do construct a representation of the author while they read—and this influences comprehension. This is the conclusion of Eefje Classen, whose study is the most thorough to date (*Author Representations in Literary Reading*, Linguistic Approaches to Literature [Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2012]).

There are several pragmatic personae that may be represented. Readers may form a representation of the author from what the text seems to imply—and thereby generate an implied author representation. However, if readers know or learn biographical information about the flesh-and-blood author, they will most likely use this information, too (ibid., 210-13). Further, readers may or may not distinguish between the narrator and either the flesh-and-blood author or implied author. It seems reasonable to assume that readers do not differentiate narrator, implied author, and flesh-and-blood author unless they learn to do so, as Marisa Bortolussi and Peter Dixon argue (*Psychonarratology: Foundations for the Empirical Study of Literary Response* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003], 72-80). Similarly, it may be assumed that readers do not deny the relevance of the author—including the author’s intention—unless they learn to do so. Indeed, Peter Stockwell argues that readers “mind-model” authors just as they do fictional characters and real-life people. I discuss “mind-modeling” below, Ch. 2:3.2.3 (“The Texture of Authorial Intention,” in *World Building: Discourse in the Mind*, ed. Joanna Gavins and Ernestine Lahey, Advances in Stylistics [London: Bloomsbury, 2016], 147-64).

Other personae who might be represented at the pragmatic level include historical and present-day readers; to my knowledge there is no research pertaining to readers’ representations of other readers.
These three—storyworld, artifact, composition representations—are interconnected. I refer to them collectively as the reader’s text representation. The text representation is part of the reader’s envisionment.

Comprehension proceeds by means of a cycle-by-cycle construction process in which an incoming focal statement is integrated with the reader’s text representation. The reception of a focal statement is always qualified by the character of the existing text representation. This may be further specified in two ways. First, the integration of a focal statement into a text representation is always implicitly a selective, interpretive process. Inasmuch as the incoming statement is integrated into the text representation it is at the same time construed in such-and-such a way. The focal statement is “made sense of” in terms of the working text representation. Every subsequent act of comprehension is therefore shaped by prior acts of comprehension.\(^{33}\) One way that subsequent acts are qualified by the text representation is through the generation of anticipation. The state of the storyworld representation, for example, may prompt the reader to expect certain things to follow, and these expectations may be fulfilled or frustrated.\(^{34}\)

Second, the cycle-by-cycle construction process may lead to largescale comprehension events related to the structure of the text representation. Indeed, it may


\(^{34}\) Rosenblatt, *Reader*, 54. Similarly, Iser (*Act of Reading*, 111): The reader’s position in the text is at the point of intersection between retention and protension. Each individual sentence correlate prefigures a particular horizon, but this is immediately transformed into the background for the next correlate and must therefore necessarily be modified. Since each sentence correlate aims at things to come, the prefigured horizon will offer a view which—however concrete it may be—must contain indeterminacies, and so arouse expectations as to the manner in which these are to be resolved. Each new correlate, then, will answer expectations (either positively or negatively) and, at the same time, will arouse new expectations.
happen that a reader comes to a point where a focal statement cannot be integrated into her text representation, not even with the help of inferences. Such an experience may lead the reader to realize the need for a total restructuring of her text representation, the need to re-understand altogether the storyworld, artifact, composition or their interrelations. In other words, the processing of a focal statement can sometimes precipitate the reformulation of the reader’s entire text representation. Experiences of reformulation are likely to be memorable for the reader.\textsuperscript{35}

As indicated above (Ch. 2:1.2), imagination—and thus what I call a reader’s \textit{imaginative capacity}—is involved in comprehension since the construction of a situation model is a more or less imaginative activity. Indeed, imagining is sometimes necessary for comprehension. The maintenance of a coherent representation often demands that a reader picture mental tokens in relation to each other. Imagining can also be elaborative. A reader may generate more and more detailed and vivid, sensation-like mental phenomena.\textsuperscript{36} In any case, imagining is absolutely crucial: \textit{imagination allows ...}

\textsuperscript{35} Rosenblatt, \textit{Reader}, 60-62; Iser, \textit{Act of Reading}, 126-29. In cognitive psychology (and gestalt psychology even earlier) this sort of experience is called “insight.” “Insight occurs when a person suddenly reinterprets a stimulus, situation, or event to produce a nonobvious, nondominant interpretation. This can take the form of a solution to a problem (an ‘aha moment’), comprehension of a joke or metaphor, or recognition of an ambiguous precept” (John Kounios and Mark Beeman, “The Cognitive Neuroscience of Insight,” \textit{Annual Review of Psychology} 65 [2014]: 71). Moreover, “insights often break an impasse or mental block produced because a solver initially fixated on an incorrect solution strategy or strong but ultimately unhelpful associations of a problem” (ibid., 73). Experiences of insight often involve positive emotional experience (Kounios and Beeman, “Cognitive Neuroscience of Insight,” 73); I discuss affective experience below (Ch. 2:3.2.2).

\textsuperscript{36} Elaine Scarry studies imaginary vivacity in \textit{Dreaming by the Book} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). Scarry argues that authors use certain types of descriptions—e.g., “the glide of the transparent over the surface of something underneath” (21-22)—in order to “enlist our imaginations in mental actions” (16). In
significances to arise and develop in the mind in extralinguistic forms.\textsuperscript{37} I include imagination under the heading of “comprehension,” but imagination is potentially involved in all envisionment-formative activity.

3.2 Engagement

Concomitant with the reader’s moment-by-moment comprehension of the text are a variety of activities and experiences whereby she engages the developing envisionment.

This engagement has a double effect. On the one hand, it influences the ongoing addition to guiding the reader through examples, Scarry presents exercises to illustrate principles she describes. Performed slowly, I find the following exercise particularly effective for generating an imaginative experience of weight (27-28):

Place in the mind, then, a man, a book, and a leaf. Each is a weightless image. Each is lighter than a piece of fluff. But then have the man place the leaf on his fingertip. Then, removing the leaf, put the book on his outstretched hand. Then put the leaf in one hand, and the book in the other, and have him raise and lower each arm an inch in turn, looking from one to the other. The mimesis of weight is soon achieved, even though one piece of fluff, the man, is somehow verifying the weight of another piece of fluff, the book’s, as well as his own. The verbal arts are full of such weight experiments.

Moreover, as this weight experiment shows, imagination does not pertain only to visual experience. For example, readers in certain circumstances will imagine character/narrator voices (Jessica D. Alexander and Lynne C. Nygaard, “Reading Voices and Hearing Text: Talker-Specific Auditory Imagery in Reading,” \textit{Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance} 34 [2008]: 446-59; Christopher A. Kurby, Joseph P. Magliano, and David N. Rapp, “Those Voices in Your Head: Activation of Auditory Images During Reading,” \textit{Cognition} 112 [2009]: 457-61).

\textsuperscript{37} Iser writes of imagining characters in contrast to seeing film portrayals: “Our mental images do not serve to make the character physically visible; their optical poverty is an indication of the fact that they illuminate the character, not as an object, but as a bearer of meaning” (\textit{Act of Reading}, 138). Peter Mendelsund similarly claims (\textit{What we See when we Read: A Phenomenology with Illustrations} [New York: Vintage Books, 2014], 283; emphasis original):

When I’m reading a novel or story, the contents—places, people, things—of the drama recede and are supplanted by \textit{significance}. The vision of a flowerpot, say, is replaced by my readerly calculation of the meaning and importance of this flowerpot. We are ever gauging these significances in texts, and much of what we “see” when we read is this “significance.” All this changes when a book is adapted.
development, and this in many subtle ways that are not amenable to generalization. On the other hand, it leaves traces in the envisionment. I approach engagement in terms of five types, each of which I describe in the subsections that follow: judging (3.2.1); affective experience (3.2.2); perspective involvement (3.2.3); predicament involvement (3.2.4); and entanglement (3.2.5).³⁸ Engagement is directed toward the reader’s emerging envisionment, pitched at any one of the three types of text representation.

3.2.1 Judging

The reader may make judgments during reading, that is, discriminate between what is good/pleasing and bad/displeasing.³⁹ The reader’s judgments may be known to

³⁸ The language of “engagement” is important in the reading studies of 1996–2005 (Alexander and Fox, “Historical Perspective on Reading,” 20-25). In this literature “engagement” has to do with students being motivated to read, e.g., John T. Guthrie and Alan Wigfield, “Engagement and Motivation in Reading,” in Handbook of Reading Research, Vol. 3, ed. Michael L. Kamil et al. (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2000), 403-22. I am not using the word in this sense. Instead, what I call engagement is similar to what Rosenblatt refers to as “the accompanying current of responses” (Reader, 48-49):

Even as we are generating the work of art, we are reacting to it. A concurrent stream of feelings, attitudes, and ideas is aroused by the very work being summoned up under the guidance of the text…. The reaction to the emerging work may be felt merely as a general state of mind, an ambiance of acceptance, approval, incredulity. Such responses may be momentary, peripheral, almost woven into the texture of what is felt to be the work itself. Or the reaction may at times take more conscious form. The range of potential responses and the gamut of degrees of intensity and articulateness are infinitely vast, since they depend not only on the character of the text but even more on the special character of the individual reader.


³⁹ That readers make judgments during reading is a noncontroversial claim. The importance of judging activity is demonstrated by several studies. James Phelan argues that reader judgments are central to the potential rhetorical effects of narrative (Experiencing Fiction: Judgments, Progressions, and the Rhetorical Theory of Narrative, Theory and Interpretation of Narrative Series [Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 2007], 1-24). Alan C. Purves and Victoria Rippere identify “evaluation” as one of
the reader, even mentally or verbally expressed, e.g., *This guy is terrible*, or they may arise implicitly and outside the reader’s awareness. They may come in subjective terms, *I like/dislike this*, or objective terms, *This is good/bad*. And they may arise automatically or through effort. There are *storyworld judgments*, i.e., judging characters and their actions; *artifact judgments*, i.e., judging the author and other readers; and *composition judgments*, i.e., judging the quality of writing—from style to plotting.

To make a judgement, the reader applies a standard. The reader makes storyworld judgments and artifact judgements in the same way that she makes judgements in life. These judgments reflect the reader’s *world standards*. Composition judgments reflect the reader’s *literary standards* developed through prior experience with literature/stories.

3.2.2 Affective Experience

Readers may have various affective experiences during reading. The complexity of affective experience is such as to recommend considering it in itself before doing so with respect to reading. “Affect” is a broad term that includes emotions, moods, and other

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four ways students respond (in writing) to literature (*Elements of Writing About a Literary Work: A Study of Response to Literature*, NCTE Research Report [Champaign, IL: National Council of Teachers of English, 1968], 8, 41-45). In an empirical study of viewers’ responses to film—which is assumed to generalize to the reception of other media—Matthew A. Bezdek, Jeffrey E. Foy, and Richard J. Gerrig present “positive character evaluations” and “negative character evaluations” as two of eight categories of participatory response (“‘Run for It!’: Viewers’ Participatory Responses to Film Narratives,” *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts* 7 [2013]: 409-16).

Rosenblatt observes that readers’ judgements—such as judging the behavior of Cordelia and Lear in the opening scene of Shakespeare’s *King Lear*—sometimes have tremendous effects on the entire subsequent processing of the text (*Reader*, 66-67).

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phenomena. Emotions differ from moods in three ways. First, in terms of duration, emotions are relatively brief whereas moods are long-lasting. Second, in terms of intensity, emotions are usually more intense, moods less. Third, in terms of cause, an emotion is typically elicited by a specific object or event whereas moods often take hold for less clearcut reasons. I limit the following discussion to the topic of emotional experience.

It is within the mainstream of theory today to describe emotional experience in terms of the following four things: a core affect that manifests itself in behavioral/attentional reorientation and bodily changes while at the same time being subject to a process of conceptualization. Core affect consists of two variables, degree of pleasantness—“valence”—and degree of activation. If valence is imagined as a horizontal axis running from unpleasant to pleasant, and the continuum from deactivation to activation is imagined as a vertical axis, then the intersection of the two creates four quadrants—four types of core affect—as follows: pleasant activation, e.g., excited, happy; unpleasant activation, e.g., nervous, upset; unpleasant deactivation, e.g., bored.

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42 Eysenck and Keane, *Cognitive Psychology*, 636.

depressed; pleasant deactivation, e.g., relaxed, contented. Core affect manifests in behavioral reorientation, i.e., a readiness to act in a certain way; attentional reorientation, i.e., a redirection of the senses or mental focus and/or a readiness for the perception of certain types of phenomena; and bodily changes, such as a change in facial expression or heartrate. In addition, core affect is instantly subject to a process of conceptualization. In this process the amorphous experience activates emotion concepts and memories and so becomes defined in a particular way, interpreted as a certain kind of experience. Core affect, its manifestations, and its conceptualization are all aspects of emotional experience.

Emotional experience during reading involves at least three things: the reader’s sensitivities, emotional complexity, and emotional memories. For a person to generate an emotion there must be an eliciting object or event to which the person is sensitive. Individuals differ in their sensitivities. What might elicit an emotion in one person may

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45 For example, fear, an unpleasant and active core affect sometimes manifests as a readiness to run or scream for help (behavioral reorientation); a sudden redirection of attention to the fear elicitor and/or a diffuse readiness to perceive additional threats (attentional reorientation); as well as acceleration in heartbeat and tension in muscles (bodily changes).


47 Moreover, emotion can be regulated up or down both prior to an emotion episode, e.g., by avoiding or seeking to encounter or imagine emotion elicitors, and during an episode, e.g., by suppressing or exaggerating a smile/grimace, or by “feeding” an emotion—imagining hate-inducing things to sustain a hateful affect (James J. Gross, “Emotion Regulation: Conceptual and Empirical Foundations,” in *Handbook of Emotion Regulation*, 2nd ed., ed. idem [New York: Guilford, 2013], 3-20).
elicit nothing or a different emotion in another.  

Storyworld emotions, e.g., joy at a character’s good fortune, and artifact emotions, e.g., disgust at the author of such a work, a sense of communion with other readers, are triggered in accordance with the same sensitivities operational for the individual in life—what might be called world sensitivities. Composition emotions, e.g., delight in a well-worded sentence, irritation at a contrived resolution, are triggered in accordance with the individual’s literary sensitivities.  

In addition, emotional experience reflects the reader’s emotional complexity. Researchers study emotional complexity in terms of two dimensions, “dialecticism” and “emotional granularity.” “Dialecticism” refers to “the experience of pleasant and unpleasant states in coincidental or temporally related fashion.” The more emotionally

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48 Sensitivities vary within an individual as well, in accordance with the person’s mood and present concerns. Patrick Colm Hogan identifies three factors that lead to regularity and diversity of sensitivity among individuals (What Literature Teaches Us about Emotion, Studies in Emotion and Social Interaction [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011], 48-51). First, there are “innate sensitivities,” e.g., fear/disturbance is elicited by reptilian motion. Second, some sensitivities are developed through “affective learning,” especially in “critical period experiences.” The “critical period” is childhood and the “experiences” include not only firsthand emotional incidents but also the child’s observation of the emotional experiences of adults and peers.  

Finally, sensitivities are developed as persons accrue implicit emotional memories that are associated with various phenomena. In cognitive psychology a distinction is made between “explicit” and “implicit memory.” Whereas “explicit memory” is representational, e.g., having a memory of when I rode my bike to the park one day, “implicit memory” is procedural, e.g., retaining the ability to ride a bike. Regarding emotion, whereas I might have an explicit memory of having broken my leg in a bike wreck, I might, upon seeing a bike, experience fear/anxiety—have an implicit memory—without necessarily explicitly remembering the wreck.

49 Rosenblatt refers to the possibility that the reader experiences “an admireing recognition of the author’s strategy (or, per contra, irritation at it)” (Reader, 68-69).

complex person experiences dialectical emotional states more regularly than the less complex.\textsuperscript{51}

“Emotion granularity” refers to “the ability to verbally characterize emotional experiences with precision.” This ability results from the breadth afforded by a person’s range of concepts, the specificity afforded by a person’s organization and routine application of concepts, and the depth afforded by the richness of a person’s emotion concepts.\textsuperscript{52} An emotionally complex person is especially capable of verbally characterizing emotional experiences with precision. A person’s emotion granularity contributes to her very experience of emotion since there is an aspect of conceptualization in the event itself. Storyworld emotions, artifact emotions, and composition emotions all reflect the emotional complexity of the individual.

Finally, emotional experience during reading also reflects the individual’s memories of prior emotional experiences. While readers sometimes experience “fresh” emotions, at other times they remember prior emotional experiences during reading.\textsuperscript{53}

Thus emotional experience during reading involves the reader’s storehouse of emotional memories.

3.2.3 Perspective Involvement

Readers may relate to various others, e.g., characters, authors, fellow readers, in various ways during reading. I call this sort of activity perspective involvement.

\textsuperscript{51} Ibid., 515-16. In self-reports older persons generally indicate more frequent experience of dialectical emotion than younger persons (516).

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 516-19.

“Sympathy,” “empathy,” and “identification” are terms commonly employed in discussions of perspective involvement. But people use these terms in nontechnical ways, too, and their technical definitions are in dispute among and within specialized domains. Hence in this section I delineate five types of perspective involvement: reactive affect, self-oriented perspective-taking, other-oriented perspective-taking, spontaneous identification, and deliberate identification. These five types of activity are not specific to reading but rather are ways of relating to individuals in real life.

The first type of perspective involvement is reactive affect, when affect arises in an individual (an “observer”) as a result of her viewing an other (a “target”) in some storyworld.

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Others attempt to characterize the overall perspectival relationship between the reader and storyworld characters and events. For example, D. W. Harding argues that readers have the role of “spectators” (“Psychological Processes in the Reading of Fiction,” British Journal of Aesthetics 2 [1962]: 133-47). In contrast, Richard J. Gerrig and Matthew E. Jacovina argue that readers experience storyworlds as “side-participants” (“Reader Participation in the Experience of Narrative” Psychology of Learning and Motivation 51 [2009]: 223-51).

Joanne M. Golden and John T. Guthrie argue—and demonstrate with a small-scale empirical study—that when readers relate to different characters they come to different interpretations. Readers describe the central conflict of the narrative in terms of the character with whom they connect (“Convergence and Divergence in Reader Response to Literature,” Reading Research Quarterly 21 [1986]: 419).

55 For storyworld perspective involvement, i.e., the reader relating to a character, there must be at least a rudimentary imagining of the situated character.
situation.\textsuperscript{56} There are two types of reactive affect, \textit{mere reactive affect} and \textit{congruent reactive affect}. \textit{Mere reactive affect}, on the one hand,

[refers to] affects that, while resulting from an observer’s perception of a target, fail to match even the valence of the target’s affects. For example, if the target experiences fear, and the observer experiences pity as a result…. Another example … [is] when a subject observes a target being mistreated and becomes angry in response even though the target himself is not experiencing anger.\textsuperscript{57}

\textit{Congruent reactive affect}, on the other hand, refers to an experience in which the observer’s affect not only results from the perception of the target but is also qualitatively similar to the target’s affect, that is, alike in valence and, perhaps, activation, as when the target experiences contentedness and the observer experiences calm as a result.\textsuperscript{58}

The second and third types of perspective involvement, \textit{self-oriented perspective-taking} and \textit{other-oriented perspective-taking}, are more complex—both require additional imaginative/cognitive activity. Of the two, \textit{self-oriented perspective-taking} is relatively simple. “In self-oriented perspective-taking, a person represents herself in another person’s situation. Thus if I engage in self-oriented perspective-taking with you, I

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\item \textsuperscript{56} The descriptions of reactive affect, self-oriented perspective-taking, and other-oriented perspective-taking I adopt from Amy Coplan, “Understanding Empathy: Its Features and Effects” (in Coplan and Goldie, \textit{Empathy}, 3-18). She identifies a number of behaviors that are similar to but distinct from “empathy”; these similar behaviors help to form the range of perspective involvement that I am outlining.
\item \textsuperscript{57} Coplan, “Understanding Empathy,” 7.
\item \textsuperscript{58} Ibid. Congruent reactive affect is similar to what is sometimes meant by “sympathy.”
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imagine what it’s like for me to be in your situation.” More complicated is other-oriented perspective-taking:

In other-oriented perspective-taking, a person represents the other’s situation from the other person’s point of view and thus attempts to simulate the target individual’s experiences as though she were the target individual. Thus I imagine that I am you in your situation, which is to say I attempt to simulate your experiences from your point of view.

Unlike reactive affect and self-oriented perspective-taking, other-oriented perspective-taking requires that the observer attempt to understand the target’s experience of her situation; this makes other-oriented perspective-taking the most difficult kind of perspective involvement to perform. The observer must imaginatively develop a sense of the target’s psychology. This involves what is sometimes called “mind-modeling,” “the capacity that humans evidently have for imagining and maintaining a working model of the characteristics, outlook, beliefs, motivations and consequent behavior of others.”

Mind-modeling is difficult to do well for three reasons. First, people typically assume that others are more similar to themselves than is often the case. Second, to model at all accurately or extensively the modeler must have reliable knowledge about the other.

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Finally, sustained effort is necessary in order to keep personal values and beliefs from interfering.\(^{62}\) Indeed, it is likely that when an individual mind-models an other, the individual does not start from scratch but rather takes as prototypical her own psychological workings and so begins with a template that is already biased.\(^{63}\) In addition, other-oriented perspective-taking requires not only the development of a model of the other’s mind but also “running” the model—that is, imagining the psychological state that would arise in the other given a particular situation. Other-oriented perspective-taking is thus difficult to do, both in terms of the effort required and the complexity of the activity.

The final two types of perspective involvement, \textit{spontaneous identification} and \textit{deliberate identification}, are explicitly self-referential.\(^{64}\) \textit{Spontaneous identification} means to experience oneself as connected to an other because of a perceived similarity between the other and oneself. This sense of connection typically leads to greater attentiveness to the mindset and situation of the other. Identification can also be effortful and intentional—there are acts of \textit{deliberate identification}. \textit{Deliberate identification} is the attempt to experience oneself as connected to the other by seeking out similarities between the other and oneself; the experience of connection may lead one to feel more

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\(^{63}\) Stockwell and Mahlberg, “Mind-Modeling,” 133-34. Michael W. Myers and Sara D. Hodges review research pertaining to the difficulties individuals have with attempts to infer the mental states of others ("Making It Up and Making Do: Simulation, Imagination, and Empathic Accuracy,") in Markman, Klein, and Suhr, \textit{Handbook of Imagination}, 281-94).

\(^{64}\) I shall not newly define “identification” but only specify the two senses in which I use the term. Carroll documents various ways that the term has been employed (“On Some Affective Relations,” 165-69).
involved in the events surrounding the other and/or more connected to those considered to be intimate with the other.

Readers may experience *storyworld perspective involvement*, i.e., engage in any of the five forms of perspective involvement in relation to imagined characters. In addition, readers may experience *artifact perspective involvement*, i.e., engage in any of the five forms of perspective involvement in relation to the author or other readers. Underlying both are the reader’s *world sensitivities* and *emotional complexity* (described above, Ch. 2:3.2.2) as well as her general susceptibility to relate to others, *social attentiveness*; her ability to imagine the mindsets of others, *mind-modeling capacity*; and her perception of her own identity, *self-view*.65

3.2.4 Predicament Involvement

The reverse side of perspective involvement is what I call *predicament involvement*. While this is coincidental with perspective involvement, this category describes reader engagement as it pertains to situations and the progression of events. Predicament involvement refers to the reader’s performance of activities such as outcome preferencing, e.g., hoping that a character chooses one option rather than another;

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65 In many cases readers are presented with multiple perspectives over the course of reading. In Iser’s terms, the reader inhabits a “wandering viewpoint” (*Act of Reading*, 114):

As the sentences of a text are always situated within the perspective that they constitute, the wandering viewpoint is also situated in a particular perspective during every moment of reading, but—and herein lies the special nature of the wandering viewpoint—it is not confined to that perspective. On the contrary, it constantly switches between the textual perspectives, each of the switches representing an articulate reading moment; it simultaneously offsets and relates the perspective.

As the reader progresses she is presented with one perspective and then another. Given this, she will (sometimes automatically, sometimes effortfully) find ways to relate the perspectives to each other—compare, contrast, or otherwise draw connections among the varying views.
outcome speculating, e.g., guessing that a character will do such and such; and problem-solving, e.g., determining that a character should do such and such. Predicament involvement seems to occur only vis-à-vis the storyworld—hence there is only storyworld predicament involvement. While problem-solving activity may be said to reflect the problem-solving capacity of the reader, there do not seem to be any readily delineable capacities that underlie predicament involvement specifically. It seems to me that outcome preferences probably emerge because of other aspects of the reader’s engagement (her judgments, affective experience, perspective involvement, and entanglement).

3.2.5 Entanglement

When the reader senses that something of personal import is at stake she experiences what I call entanglement. Here the reading seems either to touch on matters that are especially significant to the reader or to validate or invalidate her routine ways of thinking and perceiving. There are two types of entanglement: storyworld entanglement, e.g., an imagined character is a victim of clerical sex abuse and the reader is a member of the church; and artifact entanglement, e.g., the reading is from the Bible and the reader is a Christian.

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66 Bezdek, Foy, and Gerrig count “problem-solving instruction,” “problem-solving assertion,” “replotting” (to a preferred outcome), and “outcome preference” among their eight categories of response (“Participatory Responses,” 410).

Entanglement comes about in a straightforward way when the reading involves matters relevant to the reader’s *core preoccupations*, i.e., the people, relationships, beliefs, values, ideas, projects, etc., that are objects of an individual’s habitual concern and/or critical to her sense of self and world. Entanglement also happens in a more complicated way when the reader experiences the validation or invalidation of her *personal constructs*.

“Personal constructs” are bipolar distinctions that serve as channels for thought and perception and operate predominantly outside of conscious awareness. People generate personal constructs to gain cognitive purchase on the otherwise chaotic array of phenomena before them. Personal constructs are bipolar distinctions wherein elements identified with one pole are alike and by the same token different from elements identified with the opposite pole. For example, the construct *boy vs. girl* distinguishes along the lines of sex, e.g., what makes Jack and Tim the same is also what makes them different from Gale.

As channels of thought and perception, personal constructs enable but also set the routine limits of thought and perception. For example, presented with the same phenomena, some will process a shirt as “blue” by means of a *blue vs. not blue* construct.

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69 Personal constructs can themselves be changed; thus they set “routine” limits, not permanent ones.
that distinguishes along a broad dimension of color; others may process the same shirt as “eggshell blue” by means of an eggshell blue vs other blues construct that operates at a finer level, within the dimension of blueness itself. Moreover, some may process the shirt by means of constructs having nothing to do with color, e.g., expensive vs. cheap, old vs. new, clean vs. dirty. But in all cases a personal construct enables and restricts thought and perception. In this way thought and perception are, on the one hand, never exhaustive because there are always aspects of the array that are not attended to. And on the other hand, thought and perception are always interpretive because that which is attended to has already thereby undergone construal.

Moreover, as the “blue” example above suggests, constructs may be arranged into systems and these systems may be more or less organized and elaborate. A boy vs. girl construct that distinguishes along the lines of sex is simple. But nesting a boy vs. girl construct within a social vs. natural construct (distinguishing dimensions of reality shaped by human institutions from dimensions that are not) yields a system elaborated enough to enable perception of both the social conventions and the biological realities at play in differentiating between boys and girls. Furthermore, those working with a social vs. natural construct may perceive other domains through it, e.g., employment, education, poverty. For these people the social vs. natural construct is a relatively fundamental construct because it bears upon several domains.

Every time a construct is operative it is subject to validation or invalidation. There is always some level of entanglement during reading because the thought/perception that takes place always involves the potential validation or invalidation of the constructs employed. In a narrower sense, however, entanglement occurs when there is validation or
invalidation of either a fundamental construct or a construct that has bearing on the reader’s core preoccupations. The reader may experience the validation of these constructs as reassuring, comforting, or perhaps boring. She may experience the invalidation of these constructs as frustrating, upsetting, confusing or perhaps challenging. The invalidation of a fundamental construct may lead to a systemwide breakdown—a rather powerful experience. This may also precipitate the generation of new constructs.

In sum, a reader may experience *storyworld entanglement* and *artifact entanglement* when the storyworld/artifact seems to relate to the reader’s core preoccupations and when the reading seems to validate or invalidate personal constructs—especially fundamental constructs and constructs relevant to core preoccupations.

### 3.3 Extratextual Accrual

In addition to comprehending the text and engaging the emerging envisionment, the reader develops her envisionment by registering additional material to it, what I call *extratextual accrual*. Reading always takes place within some situation. Especially important are the manifestation of the text, the presentation of the text, and the other people involved.

First, while it is easy to speak of an abstract, disembodied text in theoretical discussion, in every real act of reading the text is manifest in some particular way. The text manifestation is the text as it is encountered: printed or in an electronic format (or orally delivered); bound in some way, e.g., in a 1500-page anthology; annotated in some way, e.g., with copious footnotes pertaining to historical realities; covered in some way,
e.g., with a print of a contemporary painting. Moreover, the text manifestation is a real object with a perceived history of its own, e.g., *I picked this up from the stack in the university bookstore; This was my father’s copy.* It is the manifest text that the reader has in hand and marks—underlines, highlights, annotates. Any property of the text manifestation may give rise to extratextual accrual, from historical information documented in footnotes to affective experiences elicited by the manifestation, e.g., a sense of defeat at the sheer size of the text.

Second, the text is always presented to the reader in some way. A poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins may be presented in an English classroom as a piece of literature exemplifying an historical epoch—perhaps alongside other poetry from the era. It may be presented in a prayer group as a spiritual reflection to be read alongside passages from the Bible. In either case, the reader will accrue different types of extratextual material to her envisionment. Furthermore, she is likely to turn to different types of extratextual material if she finds it necessary to pursue additional knowledge, e.g., the student of English literature may research other poetry. Whatever the presentation, the text is construed in some way.

Finally, people often read in contexts populated by other people. Readers may accrue to their envisionments fellow readers’ commentary; they may also be led to

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70 Alan C. Purves argues that the English literature anthology textbook is an anomaly when considered within the broader reality of literature in society (“Towards a Revaluation of Reader Response and School Literature,” *National Research Center on Literature Teaching & Learning*, Report Series 1.8 [1993]: 2).

Roman Ingarden draws attention to physical manifestations in order to distinguish them from (virtual) aesthetic objects (“Aesthetic Experience and Aesthetic Object,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 21 [1961]: 290).
reread, re-comprehend, or re-engage the text in light of others’ comments. In addition, the reader may associate companion readers with the text. Readers may go so far as to simulate, sometimes automatically, other readers’ readings and thus accrue a whole stream of experience to their envisionments.

Material from the text manifestation, text presentation, and other people may all become incorporated into the envisionment, deliberately or otherwise, through extratextual accrual. The reader may gain/alter any kind of storyworld, artifact, or composition impression; she may also admit to envisionment associations that are idiosyncratic, what I call incidental accruals.

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71 Rosenblatt describes the possible effects of classroom discussion in the following way (Literature as Exploration, 104):

A free exchange of ideas will lead each student to scrutinize his own sense of the literary work in the light of others’ opinions. The very fact that other students stress aspects that he may have ignored or report a different impression will suggest that perhaps he has not done justice to the text. He will turn to it again to point out the elements that evoked his response and to see what can justify the other students’ responses.

72 When I think about Plato’s Phaedrus, for example, I remember the professor and classmates with whom I first read it as a sophomore in college.

73 For example, I recently read Shirley Jackson’s The Haunting of Hill House at the recommendation of a friend. At several points during the reading, without ever meaning to I found myself imagining my friend’s experience of reading the text. Similarly, someone reading a Hopkins poem in a prayer group may simulate what she imagines to be “the good Christian’s” experience of reading the poem, whether this “good Christian” is generic or associated with some member of the prayer group.

74 Russell A. Hunt explores the complex interplay of many of the realities described here. He recounts his class’s misadventure with “After Reading ‘Mons, Anzac and Kut,’” a poem written by Owen Wister, published in 1920. A student comes across the poem in a bound volume of The Atlantic Monthly. When she presents it to the class, she dates the poem to her present year, 1998. For a long time the class attempts to make sense of the poem without recognizing the misdating or inquiring as to the meaning of “‘Mons, Anzac and Kut’” (“Conditions of Reception, Conditions of Construction: The Strange Case of ‘Mons, Anzac and Kut,’” Poetics 26 [1999]: 455-68).
3.4 Management

While the reader forms an envisionment primarily through acts of comprehension, engagement, and extratextual accrual, she also regulates these activities to form an envisionment that meets her goal(s). Reading involves three types of management activity: intending an outcome; modulating envisionment-formative activities in pursuit of the outcome; and monitoring progress.

3.4.1 Intending an Outcome

An intention includes a sense of what is to be done (a task) and a purpose for doing it (a motive). The reader may set her task privately, as with a solitary reader picking up a book at home, or in accordance with her perception of the task being assigned in a given situation, as with a student reading for class. The task may be explicitly known or not, strictly or loosely defined, narrow or broad in scope, singular or multifaceted. Regardless, there is always a task.

Intertwined with the reader’s task is her motivation to perform. Broadly speaking, motivation is either intrinsic or extrinsic: “When individuals are intrinsically motivated, 

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Matthew T. McCrudden, Joseph P. Magliano, and Gregory Schraw consider the ways that comprehension is affected by four types of prompts typical of classroom reading: “prompts that target discrete text segments”; “prompts that promote explanatory inferences”; “prompts that ask readers to view a text from a designated point of reference”; and “prompts that ask readers to read for a general purpose” (“Relevance in Text Comprehension,” in Text Relevance and Learning from Text, ed. Matthew T. McCrudden, Joseph P. Magliano and Gregory J. Schraw [Charlotte, NC: Information Age, 2011], 9).

Fish famously told his class that a list of names he had written on the chalkboard was a poem and prompted them—set for them the task—to interpret it as a poem (which they attempted to do); exactly what this demonstrates is a matter of debate (Is there a Text, 322-37).

Even the solitary reader picking up a book at home is probably not pursuing an entirely idiosyncratic outcome. Language/literacy are social realities. The solitary reader has developed her sense of what may be accomplished in reading through numerous prior social encounters.
they engage in an activity because they are interested in and enjoy the activity. When extrinsically motivated, individuals engage in activities for instrumental or other reasons, such as receiving a reward." The first type of management activity is thus intending, meaning to accomplish something through the activity of reading.

3.4.2 Modulating the Primary Envisionment-Formative Activities

The second type of management activity is the modulation of the primary envisionment-formative activities in pursuit of the intended outcome. What I call modulation is a combination of what others describe in terms of “standards of coherence” and “reading stance.” Paul van den Broek and colleagues developed the concept of “standards of coherence” in the context of cognitive studies of reading comprehension. I adapt it to be broader. “Standards of coherence” [are] the types and strengths of coherence that the reader aims to maintain during reading. These standards consist of a set of implicit or explicit criteria that a reader adopts for a particular reading situation, reflecting his/her desired level of understanding. They vary between individuals as well as within an individual from one reading situation to the next. The standards influence the dynamic pattern of automatic and strategic cognitive processes that take place during reading.

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There are, then, three principal aspects of the notion of “standards of coherence.”

First standards of coherence pertain to both the type of coherence and the degree of coherence that are to be maintained. As described above (Ch. 2:1.3.2), the word “coherence” applies to the text representation that the reader mentally constructs. A reader implicitly assesses the “coherence” of her text representation in accordance with the standards operative during the reading. The standards define what counts as “coherent” both in terms of type, e.g., causal connections, logical development, verbal repetition, and degree, i.e., the extent to which every textual aspect is accounted for by the representation.79 Second, standards of coherence are reader-specific and situation-specific, that is, readers vary in the standards available to them and readers adopt different standards in different circumstances. Finally, it is in accordance with the set standards of coherence that a reader regulates effort:

During reading the automatic processes take place continually, but strategic processes do not. Strategic processes are initiated by the reader when, in the reader’s perception, they are needed to create the desired level of coherence. The phrase “in the reader’s perception” is important here, because it is the reader’s feeling about the extent to which the current sentence coheres adequately with the preceding text and with his or her background knowledge that determines whether the reader will initiate strategic processes and, if so, which processes those will be. The implicit or explicit benchmarks against which the reader assesses if the established coherence at a particular point in reading is adequate forms his or her standards of coherence.80

In short, readers are always implicitly measuring the coherence of their text representations against their operative standards of coherence and as long as automatic processes are producing a coherent enough representation then no further action is taken.

79 The notion of “standards of coherence” thus accounts for a reader’s ability to read different genres differently, to follow reading conventions; it accounts for what Culler refers to as “literary competence” (Structuralist Poetics, 131-52).

When, however, readers detect that automatic processes are not producing a satisfactory representation, they exert effort to reach the desired type/level of coherence—or alter the standard.

Although there are now countless studies pertaining to reading dispositions (using various terminology), Rosenblatt’s idea of “reading stance” is seminal. Rosenblatt argues that there is a continuum of reading stances from “efferent” to “aesthetic”:

[In efferent reading] the reader’s attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue after the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out. An extreme instance is the mother whose child has just swallowed poisonous liquid and who is frantically reading the label on the bottle to discover the antidote to be administered.... In aesthetic reading, in contrast, the reader’s primary concern is with what happens

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Drawing from cognitive studies of “metacognition,” Zwaan proposes that there are a variety of reading “cognitive control systems.” In a “literary cognitive control system,” the reader gives relatively more attention to the development of surface code representations, as exact wording is conventionally important in literature. In a “news cognitive control system,” the reader gives relatively more attention to the development of a situation model (Aspects of Literary Comprehension).

during the actual reading event. Though, like the efferent reader of a law text, say, the reader of Frost’s “Birches” must decipher the images or concepts or assertions that the words point to, he also pays attention to the associations, feelings, attitudes, and ideas that these words and their referents arouse within him. “Listening to” himself, he synthesizes these elements into a meaningful structure. In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text.\(^{82}\)

“Stance” thus refers to the reader’s management of attention. Rosenblatt adopts the notion of “selective attention” from William James:

One of the major characteristics that James postulates for the stream of thought is a continuing process of bestowing interest on particular elements of consciousness. “It is interested in some parts of these objects to the exclusion of others, and welcomes or rejects—chooses from among them, in a word—all the while.” This is the sense in which I speak of the efferent reader screening out all but the needed end result or residue. Similarly, the aesthetic reader bestows attention on a fuller arc of his response to the verbal symbols, selecting out what can be woven into the relevant structure of idea, feeling, and attitude.\(^{83}\)

Rosenblatt’s “efferent” and “aesthetic stances” are, then, two general ways in which readers may go about managing attention.

Both “standards of coherence” and “reading stance” pertain to the overarching regulation of reading activity; however, whereas “standards of coherence” is well-specified but narrow in scope, “reading stance” is underspecified but broad in scope—it applies to reading as such. I propose expanding the notion of “standards of coherence” to apply to reading more broadly and in that way to account for what Rosenblatt calls “stance.”

Thus the second type of management activity is the standards-based modulation of envisionment-formative activities. In forming an intention, the reader adopts not only

\(^{82}\) Rosenblatt, Reader, 23-25.

coherence standards but a whole set of envisionment standards; the reader then modulates envisionment-formative activities in accordance with these standards. The reader modulates up or down, dedicates greater or lesser attention and effort to different aspects of her comprehension, engagement, and extratextual accrual activities in order to meet her envisionment standards. The reader seeks certain types of coherence, certain types of engagement, e.g., affective involvement, entanglement, and certain types of extratextual knowledge in accordance with her envisionment standards.84

Readers draw from the range of envisionment standards they have developed, and they modulate envisionment-formative activities in accordance with their attention/effort management capacity.

3.4.3 Monitoring

To recap: the reader develops an intention; based on this intention, she adopts envisionment standards; in accordance with these standards, she modulates the primary envisionment-formative activities. In addition, the reader monitors the developing envisionment to ensure that it is meeting the standards and fulfilling the intention.85 The reader may become distracted, and her volition may flag. Hence she monitors her envisionment to make sure the development is on track, that it is meeting the standards—

84 “Stance,” then, refers to a set of envisionment standards in so much as they are operative during reading.

85 “Monitoring” is a standard dimension of metacomprehension and metacognition more broadly. For example, Ruddell and Unrau describe a “reader executive and monitor” in their model of reading (“Reading,” 1017, 1037-38). John Dunlosky and Amanda R. Lipko make frequent reference to monitoring activity in their summary of “metacomprehension” (“Metacomprehension: A Brief History and How to Improve its Accuracy,” Current Directions in Psychological Science 16 [2007]: 228-32).
and that the standards are appropriate. Readers are better or worse at monitoring in accordance with their self-monitoring ability.  

3.5 Usage

Whenever a reader accesses/draws on her envisionment there are greater or lesser formative repercussions on the envisionment. Usage, then, must be included in EDMR even though—I admit—it is not technically a “reading” activity. Whatever causes the envisionment usage I call an eliciting occurrence. Usage can be either private (internal) or public (external). The reader may privately and mentally bring an envisionment to bear on a new event, e.g., the reader is reminded of a scene from a story when she is later in a similar situation and she considers the scene to understand the new event. In these cases, not only might the new event be registered into the envisionment but the very structure of the envisionment may be reformed in light of the new event.

Usage may also be public. On the one hand, a reader may informally talk about what she has read. Simply verbalizing the envisionment may further form it. On the

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86 When monitoring is not well done there can be the “illusion of knowing” which arises from “the discrepancy … between self-assessment of understanding and objective accuracy of understanding” (Arthur M. Glenberg, Alex Cherry Wilkinson, and William Epstein, “The Illusion of Knowing: Failure in the Self-Assessment of Comprehension,” Memory & Cognition 10 [1982]: 597). Allison J. Jaeger and Jennifer Wiley argue that analogies can lead readers to have higher levels of confidence in their understanding even when the understanding is poor (“Reading an Analogy Can Cause the Illusion of Comprehension,” Discourse Processes 52 [2015]: 376-405).

87 It may happen that the reader not only talks about her envisionment but exchanges ideas—in this case, there will be not only usage but also extratextual accrual.
other hand, the reader may formally construct a report or argument about the reading, as when a student writes an essay.  

4. Conclusion

In sum, EDMR defines reading as a process of developing a mental envisionment through three primary classes of envisionment-formative activity (*comprehension*, *engagement*, and *extratextual accrual*), a superordinate class of management activity, and one secondary class of envisionment-formative activity (*usage*). Through acts of comprehension, the reader receives statements from the text and forms mental text representations (*storyworld representations, artifact representations, and composition representations*). Through engagement (*judging, affective involvement, perspective involvement, predication involvement, and entanglement*), the reader experiences the emerging text representation; this not only influences the progression of the reading event, but also the experiences may be preserved in the envisionment, e.g., as *storyworld judgments, as artifact entanglements*. Through extratextual accrual the reader incorporates into her envisionment additional impressions/understandings from the situation: from the way the text is manifest, the way it is presented, and from other people. When the impression is not substantially related to the text, it is an *incidental*

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88 Purves and Rippere catalogue “elements of writing about a literary work”; any statement about a literary work, they argue, may be understood as falling within one of the following four categories: “engagement-involvement,” “perception,” “interpretation,” or “evaluation” (*Elements of Writing*, 1-46).

A formal assignment may be understood to have a double effect on envisionment development: the assignment influences both the intention that governs the development from the outset and it also demands the usage of the envisionment, which has further formative repercussions on the envisionment. Moreover, formal deployment often necessitates rereading, and thus additional acts of comprehension and engagement, as well as research, and thus additional extratextual accrual.
accrual. All of these activities are performed concurrently and successively; the emerging envisionment qualifies each act and each act alters the envisionment.

The reader’s envisionment—the total network of understandings and impressions she associates with the text—is potentially populated by a great variety of things: text representations of different kinds, traces of different kinds of engagement, and miscellaneous incidental accruals. The reader directs the formation of her envisionment through management activities. She forms an intention—in part through perceiving the task issued in the situation. She adopts envisionment standards in line with her intention. And she modulates her acts of comprehension, engagement, and extratextual accrual to develop an envisionment that meets these standards. She also monitors the emerging envisionment to ensure it is acceptable. Finally, the envisionment may undergo further development any time it is subsequently used by the reader.

In EDMR, the reader is thoroughly active and active in a variety of ways; moreover, every type of activity implicates aspects of the reader that may be understood to underlie the act, e.g., world knowledge, imaginative capacity, world sensitivities, core preoccupations. A delineation of aspects is important in two ways. First, each aspect is a dimension whereby readers may be similar or different; delineating dimensions is thus helpful in discussions pertaining to the convergence and divergence of reader envisionments. Second, it may be assumed that any aspect of the reader that becomes operative during reading may, through that activity, be changed. Delineating reader aspects reveals the variety of ways that texts and reading may be beneficial.
EDMR is thus a reasonably comprehensive account of reading. It identifies a full range of reader activities, a variety of envisionment-constituents, and an array of reader aspects. In the three chapters that follow, I draw on EDMR to elucidate parables.
Figure 1: A Rudimentary Cognitive Model of Reading Comprehension (RCM)

Figure 2: An Envisionment-Development Model of Reading (EDMR)
Table 1: Reading Acts, Reader Aspects, Situation Aspects, and Envisionment Constituents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Reader Aspects or [Situation Aspects]</th>
<th>Aspects of Envisionment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Comprehension | • world knowledge  
• domain knowledge  
• personal knowledge  
• inferencing skills  
• working memory capacity  
• imaginative capacity | • storyworld representation  
• artifact representation  
• composition representation |
| Engagement | Judging | • world standards  
• literary standards | • storyworld judgments  
• artifact judgments  
• composition judgments |
| | Affective Experience | • world sensitivities  
• literary sensitivities  
• emotional complexity  
• emotional memories | • storyworld emotions  
• artifact emotions  
• composition emotions |
| | Perspective Involvement | • social attentiveness  
• mind-modeling capacity  
• self-view | • storyworld perspective involvements  
• artifact perspective involvements |
| | Predicament Involvement | • problem-solving capacity | • storyworld predicament involvements |
| | Entanglement | • core preoccupations  
• personal constructs | • storyworld entanglements  
• artifact entanglements |
| Extratextual Accrual | • [text manifestation]  
• [text presentation]  
• [other people] | • (additions/alterations)  
• incidental accruals |
| Management | • [task assignment]  
• intention  
• envisionment standards  
• attention/effort management capacity  
• self-monitoring ability | |
| Usage | • [eliciting occurrence] | • (additions/alterations)  
• incidental accruals |
CHAPTER 3

THE ALLOWANCE FOR DIVERGENT INFERENCES IN THE PRODIGAL SON
(LUKE 15:11-32)

In this chapter I argue the following thesis: regarding The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32), there is allowance for divergent and even mutually exclusive inferences over non-trivial matters. To begin, I describe features of the parable generative of the allowance (Section 1). In the bulk of this chapter, I explore the allowance by reviewing inferences that commentators have proposed (Section 2). In many cases the same segments of text are construed in opposed ways—with roughly equal support in the parable. Rather than treating studies of The Prodigal Son (henceforth, PS) in turn, I have created three tables that together present in summary the range of proposed inferences.\(^1\) Finally, I propose a new claim: The inferential allowance of The Prodigal Son may be taken as evidence to infer that the author intended that the parable be received in an aesthetic mode (Section 3). I develop this claim in Chapter 4, where I define an aesthetic reading mode in EDMR terminology.

Since this chapter deals extensively with inferencing, I restate here the definition given above (Ch. 2:1.3): an inference is the determination of additional information from what is already known or believed.

1. Features of PS Generative of its Allowance for Inferences

   In PS there is allowance for mutually exclusive inferences of story-defining consequence; this is because of the parable’s manner of disclosure. For each of the three major personae—whom I shall refer to as Father, Younger, and Elder—there is a

\(^1\) The three tables are appended to this chapter.
measured presentation.\textsuperscript{2} The narrator gives no explicit commentary. Instead, there are direct statements in the characters’ voices; there are actions, internal states, and events described by a narrator; and there is the implicit configurative potential of these.\textsuperscript{3}

A great deal of the text is in direct discourse. The Greek text of PS is 391 words in length.\textsuperscript{4} There are five speakers: the narrator; Younger; Father; a slave; and Elder. Roughly 50\% of the words (197) are spoken by the narrator and 50\% (194) are direct discourse. Younger speaks to Father (8 words; 15:12), speaks to himself (42 words; 15:17-19), and speaks to Father (14 words; 15:21), for a total of 64 words. Father speaks to his slaves (43 words; 15:22-24) and to Elder (30 words; 15:31-32), for a total of 73 words. The slave speaks to Elder (17 words; 15:27), for a total of 17 words. And Elder speaks to Father (40 words; 15:29-30), for a total of 40 words. Appended to the chapter is the Greek text of PS presented as a drama; this layout gives visual immediacy to the proportion of direct discourse in the story.

The abundance of direct discourse together with the absence of commentary complexifies the reader’s development of a coherent envisionment. The reader is presented with characters doing, saying, and experiencing things, but she is not given

\textsuperscript{2} Many refer to something like the measured disclosure I discuss here, e.g., George W. Ramsey (“Plots, Gaps, Repetitions, and Ambiguity in Luke 15,” \textit{PRSt} 17 [1990]: 33-42); Wright (\textit{Voice of Jesus}, 187-95); Breech (\textit{Silence of Jesus}, 188).

\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Configurative potential} refers to the possibility for significances to come about for a reader as she connects individual statements together. For example, if the reader connects the report that Father goes out to Elder (15:28) with the report that Father runs out to Younger (15:20), certain significances may arise. All the individual things presented in the text are implicitly to be taken together, and there is potential for significance in how they are fitted together. I have adopted the notion of \textit{configurative potential} from Iser, who writes of \textit{configurative meaning} (\textit{Act of Reading}, 114-18).

\textsuperscript{4} References to the Greek text of Luke here and throughout are from NA\textsuperscript{27}.
explicit guidance (authoritative commentary) as to how to construe the words and deeds or how to combine everything into a whole. Additionally, whatever is conveyed in direct discourse is qualified, it is always *from-the-speaker’s-perspective*. On the one hand, this means that whatever is said is not necessarily accurate regarding the storyworld. On the other hand, what a character says reflects the character’s perspective and thereby provides grounds for making inferences about the person/state of the character. An example of this is Elder’s description of his brother: ὁ καταφαγῶν σου τὸν βίον μετὰ πορνῶν (15:30). The reader does not know if Elder is stating something accurate about the events of the storyworld—that Younger wasted money on prostitutes; in addition, the reader might see in this description an indirect disclosure about Elder, that he is someone who makes up stories, lashes out in anger. Direct discourse creates possibilities for making inferences but rarely compels any certain inference. The parable’s manner of disclosure seems to ensure that multiple construals will be possible and no construal will be definitive. The abundance of direct discourse and absence of authoritative guidance creates allowance for divergent, even mutually exclusive inferences. An examination of construals proposed in studies of PS bears this out.

2. The Allowance for Divergent Inferences Evident in Readings of PS

Among studies of PS, the storyworld itself is in contention. There is considerable disagreement about the states and changes of affairs that comprise the story itself. In this section I present the range of construals of the entire story (2.1); then I document proposed claims pertaining to individual text segments (2.2), examining in detail five cases in which text segments are construed in mutually exclusive ways (2.2.1-2.2.5);
finally, I note three sorts of problems concerning the presentation of inferences in parable studies (2.3).

2.1 Studies of PS in Terms of Evaluative Construals of the Principal Characters

Reducing studies of PS to their operative evaluative construals of the principal characters makes apparent the variety of understandings of the storyworld. In this way I have produced Table 2. If we may assume that Father, Younger, and Elder are the three principal characters in PS, and that each of them may be judged to be positive (+), negative (−), or dynamic/mixed (Δ), then there are twenty-seven theoretical possibilities for construing PS in terms of these character evaluations. Table 2 consists of twenty-seven rows, one for each of these possibilities—the permutations of the evaluative construals of Father, Younger, and Elder. The first three columns list the possible evaluative construals first for Father, then for Younger, and then for Elder. This yields twenty-seven rows, which are numbered in the fourth column. While the table could be arranged with the characters in any order, I have opted to give Father the primary place because differences in the evaluative construal of Father tend to correspond with the greatest difference in understandings of the storyworld. In the fifth column, labeled “Proponents,” twenty-five studies of PS are located according to the evaluative construals operative in each one’s description of the parable. I have aimed to include here a substantial number of studies without any pretention to producing something exhaustive.5

5 I include in Table 2 the following eight studies, which I have not yet referenced: Richard Chenvix Trench, Notes on the Parables of Our Lord (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1982 [1862]); Ruth Etchells, A Reading of the Parables of Jesus (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1998); David A. Holgate, Prodigality, Liberality and Meanness in the Parable of the Prodigal Son: A Greco-Roman Perspective on Luke 15:11-32, JSNTSup 187 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999); Arland J. Hultgren, The Parables of Jesus: A Commentary, Bible in its World (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000);
Table 2 is comprehensive, however, in a sense: affording a row to each of the twenty-seven theoretical possibilities, any study could be located on the table even if it is not discussed here. In addition, in the fifth column, positions 1, 4, 7, 10, and 19 have been grayed out because they are nonviable possibilities.6

It is immediately obvious that positions 5 and 6 are by far the most favored; fifteen of the twenty-five studies fall here. In position 5 there is an entirely good, unerring Father (positive [+]), a Younger who in one way or another misbehaves early in the story but repents (mixed/dynamic [Δ]), and an Elder who, to his credit, seems a dutiful son, but who fails to act appropriately at his brother’s return (mixed/dynamic [Δ]). The proponents of position 6 are separated from position 5 only by a dotted line in Table 2 because the difference is slim: those located in position 5 explicitly recognize as positive the apparent dutifulness of Elder whereas those located in position 6 never explicitly recognize anything positive in Elder—so Elder is presented as a negative (-).7 It seems to


6 Father and Elder cannot both be construed entirely positively in a single reading in light of the conflict between them in 15:29-32, ruling out positions 1, 4, and 7. Neither can Elder and Younger both be construed entirely positively in a single reading: Elder’s accusation in 15:30 is either true, meaning that Younger is not entirely positive, or a lie, meaning that Elder is not entirely positive—ruling out positions 1, 10, and 19.

7 However, I am doubtful that any would dispute that Elder is dutiful and that this is a positive thing. In Table 2 I have aimed to group proponents in accord with their emphases. For example, Levine reckons Younger’s joining himself to a foreign citizen positive; he does this, she argues, in order to save his life. She indicates this to refute the idea that tenets of Judaism disallow such life-saving conduct. Aside from this, her view of Younger is thoroughly negative. So while Levine might be considered a proponent of
me noteworthy that traditional allegorical interpretations of the parable in which Father represents God and the other two represent contrasting ways of relating to God would be located in positions 5 and 6, although, of those listed, only Richard Chenevix Trench, Blomberg, and Klyne Snodgrass consider the parable to be “allegory.”

Of the remaining ten studies plotted, two fall in position 9: positive Father, negative Younger, negative Elder. In these studies the commentators consider Younger’s repentance inauthentic. Thus, in contrast to positions 5 and 6, Younger is an altogether negative character, not dynamic. This is the only substantial difference between position 9 and positions 5 and 6 in terms of the underlying understandings of the storyworld. The remaining eight studies depart from the positive construal of Father, disagree among themselves about the repentance of Younger, and disagree about the blameworthiness of Elder. Table 2 is meant only to be an indication of the possibilities and a summary presentation of the diverse views proposed in different studies. Supporting the differing evaluations are divergent construals of specific text segments. I turn now to a closer examination of these construals.

2.2 The Variety of Construals of Text Segments and Five Occasions for Story-Defining Mutually Exclusive Construals

Documented in Table 3 are many of the ways that commentators construe specific segments of text in studies of PS. These construals underlie the evaluations documented in Table 2. The first column lists the character in question (Father, Younger, or Elder).

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position 14, I follow the overarching emphasis of her characterization of Younger and so identify her study with position 17.

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The second column lists the evaluation (positive [+] or negative [-]). The third column numbers the rows (1-78). The fourth column summarizes the claim. The fifth column indicates the text segment under consideration. The sixth column lists the proponents of the claims, citing their work.

Before reviewing Table 3, it is important to note something about the “claims” listed in column 4. In some cases, the claim is itself an inference being drawn from the text segment under consideration (listed in column 5). For example, in row 2, Bailey and Blomberg (column 6) claim that Father complies with Younger’s request in 15:12 (column 5) out of patience/love (column 4). The text does not say that Father acts out of patience or love. Rather, Bailey and Blomberg infer this. They further construe this as a case in which Father (column 1) is doing something positive (column 2). In other cases, the claim listed in the fourth column is not an inference but is instead a direct reception of

9 The overall mixed/dynamic evaluations documented in Table 2 reflect mixtures of the specific positive and negative evaluations documented in Table 3.

10 Certain trade-offs were made to develop Table 3. First, I had to formulate the claims listed in column 4 to be more general than the exact claims made by the proponents. On the one hand, a degree of nuance was lost in this process; on the other, I was able both to keep the table from growing excessively long and to emphasize regularities.

Second, I typically list as proponents of a claim only those studies in which there is an explicit statement advancing the claim. If there is no explicit statement, the study is not listed, even when it might be assumed that the claim would be agreeable. For example, Lischer does not explicitly refer to Father being moved with compassion and so I do not list Lischer in Table 3, row 4, even though I expect that Lischer would evaluate Father’s compassion specifically as evidence/expression of his goodness.

Finally, even though the studies of Beavis, Holgate, and Snodgrass are included in Table 2, they are not included in Table 3. Holgate and Snodgrass tend to assume the states and changes of affairs of the story and attend to other matters—the inferences and evaluations they rely upon are often submerged. Beavis gives a reading of the parable from the perspective of a hypothetical reader who has been the victim of child sexual abuse (“Making Up Stories,” 101-2). This project is so singular in comparison to the other studies under consideration that to include her claims would overcomplicate Table 3.
the text under consideration. For example, row 4, column 4 states “is moved with compassion at the sight of younger son.” This is practically word for word what is stated in 15:20, the text segment under consideration (indicated in column 5). In this case, the proponents (indicated in column 6) are construing Father’s (column 1) being moved with compassion as something positive (column 2). In both cases the proponents are making evaluative construals which are not themselves in the text; in the first case, however, the proponents are also making an inference prior to the evaluative construal. In these cases, the proposed inference is open to scrutiny along with the evaluative construal.

Table 3 reveals, first of all, that commentators make diverse claims about the same text segments. Rows 11-15, for example, all refer to the same segment, 15:23-24. Scott sees Father as positive because he nourishes Younger with a feast (row 11); Trench, Etchells, and Levine view Father as positive because he wants all to share in his joy by having a feast/celebration (row 12); Bailey, Blomberg, and Forbes view Father as positive because he reconciles Younger to the village with the feast (row 13); Rohrbaugh views Father as positive because he reconciles the family to the village with the feast (row 14); and Linnemann views Father as positive here because he recognizes Younger’s return as grounds for celebration (row 15).

These claims reflect different understandings of what is happening in the storyworld. Bailey, Blomberg, and Forbes claim that there exists conflict between Younger and the village and that Father acts to resolve this; Rohrbaugh claims that the whole family has offended the village and so Father acts to overcome this offense; Trench, Etchells, and Levine do not detect a conflict between the village and Younger/the family—Father is not healing a relationship but sharing joy. Scott claims that Father is
revealing himself to be something of a good “mother” in nourishing his son. Linnemann claims that Farther is revealing himself as the sort of person who recognizes the return of the boy as grounds for celebration (in contrast to Elder’s reaction). In all these cases, the proponents agree on the evaluative construal to be made (positive Father) but their underlying claims vary widely.

Rows 67-72 reflect a similar situation concerning construals of 15:29, the first part of Elder’s statement to his father. All here agree that Elder is negative, but there are many different underlying claims. It is claimed variously that Elder: addresses his father in a non-respectful/affectionate manner (row 67); is arrogant/self-righteous, exaggerates his own goodness (row 68); is childish/selfish/jealous (row 69); wants a celebration without his family (row 70); relates to his father in terms of servility (row 71); and does not recognize the generosity of his father (row 72). Even when there is agreement about the evaluative construal, there are sometimes many different specific inferences being proposed to support the construal.

Furthermore, Table 3 helps to reveal something even more momentous. It is not only that a variety of claims are made about the same text segments, but rather that there are multiple cases in which mutually exclusive, even diametrically opposed claims are being made about the same text segments. Table 4 is derived from Table 3 and shows at a glance the segments that are subject to mutually exclusive claims. In Table 4 the verses in 15:11-32 are listed in column 2. Across the top are the six evaluative possibilities: FATHER +, FATHER -, YOUNGER +, YOUNGER -, ELDER +, ELDER -. The numbers that populate the table refer to the numbers in column 3 of Table 3. For example, in row 1, at the intersection of verse 12 and FATHER + there appears “1-2”: in
rows 1 and 2 in Table 3 there are entries in which the father is evaluated positively because of what he is construed to have done in 15:12—Trench claims that Father is wise to allow the son to discover error through experience; Bailey and Blomberg claim that Father exhibits patience/love in complying with the son’s request. Table 4 is derived from and refers to Table 3. In this way, Table 4 presents in a condensed, visually immediate way cases in which the same verses are construed in mutually exclusive ways. While I would encourage readers to explore Table 4 row by row, I have highlighted what I believe to be the five most important rows. Row 1 pertains to Younger’s request and Father’s compliance (15:12); row 4, Younger planning (15:17-19); row 6, Father’s address to his slaves (15:22-24); row 7, the discrepancy between Younger’s planned and delivered statements (15:18-19, 21-22); and row 8, Elder’s learning of the celebration (15:24-26). In each instance, the text segment is subject to mutually exclusive inferences—inferences that I find more or less equal in credibility. In the next five subsections I review each of these cases in turn.

2.2.1 Younger’s Request and Father’s Compliance (15:12) (Table 4, Row 1)

Luke 15:12, in which Younger makes his request and Father complies, has been the basis of both positive and negative evaluations of both Father and Younger. Regarding Father, Trench credits him, inferring that Father is allowing the son to discover error through experience (Table 3, row 1). Bailey and Blomberg infer from Father’s compliance that he is patient and/or loving (Table 3, row 2). Many construe this text in an opposite way. James Breech, Richard Q. Ford, Hedrick, Levine, Rohrbaugh, and Scott infer from Father’s dividing his property during his lifetime that he is, at the very least, foolish (Table 3, row 23). Ford infers that Father precipitates his son’s fall
(Table 3, row 24), and Levine similarly infers that Father’s compliance makes him complicit in Younger’s dissolute living (Table 3, row 25). Commentators thus make mutually exclusive inferences from the same text segment.

Regarding Younger, Linnemann and Luise Schottroff infer from his request that he intends to emigrate for economic betterment—an altogether appropriate course of action to their minds (Table 3, row 33). Many contend, however, that the request puts Younger in a negative light. Bailey, Blomberg, Breech, Forbes, Ford, Hultgren, Levine, Lischer, Rohrbaugh, Scott, and Wright all infer from the request some degree of moral deficiency (Table 3, row 44). Trench, who reads the text allegorically, Father standing for God, infers from the request that Younger desires independence from God (Table 3, row 45). Trench’s reading excepted, there is, by and large, textual allowance for the mutually exclusive inferences underlying the evaluations.  

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11 The matter of Younger’s request and Father’s compliance is complicated now because of uncertainty surrounding the historical norm. This may be a case in which there will have been no ambiguity for authorial audiences. There might have been a firm social norm, either that the request and compliance were improper or that they were acceptable. But what also cannot be dismissed is the possibility that even at the time opinions were divided over issuing and/or complying with these sorts of requests. Kloppenborg reviews the relevant discussion and evidence (“Deeds of Gift,” 169-94). He finds no reason to conclude that Younger’s request will have been considered improper universally, although Father’s wisdom in complying is left in question.

12 A few also find in 15:12 reason to evaluate Elder negatively. Bailey, Forbes, and Rohrbaugh all fault Elder for not protesting Younger’s request or acting in any way to reconcile the family (Table 3, row 62). Bailey’s position, however, is incoherent overall. He evaluates Younger negatively, inferring that the request is tantamount to wishing the father dead, and he evaluates Elder negatively, inferring that Elder did not protest, yet he infers from Father’s compliance only that he is loving. As Levine (Short Stories by Jesus, 51-53) and Rohrbaugh (“Dysfunctional Family,” 150-51) point out, if Younger and Elder are offending here, then so is Father.

13 As I have noted, this particular case is further complicated by the lack of clarity concerning the social norms of the time. It would be simplistic, however, to imagine that
2.2.2 Younger Planning (Luke 15:17-19) (Table 4, Row 4).

Luke 15:17-19, in which Younger comes to himself and plans his return, has been made to support both positive and negative construals of Younger. Many claim that Younger’s planning is positive—and this for a variety of reasons. Etchells and Scott infer from Younger’s plan to become a hired worker that he has become humble (Table 3, row 35). Blomberg, Donahue, Forbes, Linnemann, Scott, Trench, and Via infer that Younger has recognized his sinfulness (Table 3, row 36), and Hultgren, his foolishness (Table 3, row 37). Schottroff infers that Younger is attempting to save his life (Table 3, row 38), and Via, that he recognizes his ability to resolve the problem (Table 3, row 39). Finally, Etchells infers that Younger does well to perceive Father as generous (Table 3, row 40).

Many, however, construe Younger’s planning in a decidedly negative light. Breech and George W. Ramsey infer that Younger intends to feign contrition in order to manipulate his father (Table 3, row 54). Levine, citing Philip Sellew, infers that Younger must be doing something self-seeking/amoral because the characters that have interior monologues in other parables are all morally suspect (Table 3, row 55). Donahue infers this matter definitely resolves one way or the other, that the vast majority of the society will have seen nothing improper in the request/compliance or that the vast majority will have been appalled by both the request and the compliance. It is certainly possible that the propriety of this sort of request and compliance might have been in contention for authorial audiences.


None of the personalities whose thoughts are described is particularly commendable; indeed they tend to embody anything but noble characteristics. The self-satisfied, amoral, or even immoral individuals who star in these portrayals, who are looking out for their own interests above all, sometimes encounter unexpected divine intervention or retribution (the Farmer, perhaps also the Owner of the Vineyard), but more often they seem able to use their craftiness...
a shortcoming in Younger revealed in his wanting a relationship with his father based on servility (Table 3, row 56). Finally, Bailey infers that Younger plans to become a hired servant because he intends to maintain his pride and avoid reconciliation with his family (Table 3, row 57). Indeed, it is worth emphasizing: in Younger’s plan to become a hired worker Etchells and Scott find humility and Bailey finds pride! There is allowance in the parable for these mutually exclusive construals. The many proposed inferences are roughly equally adequate to the text.

2.2.3 Father’s Address to his Slaves (15:22-24) (Table 4, Row 6)

Another instance of allowance for mutually exclusive inferences occurs in 15:22-24, when Father speaks to his slaves. Both Father and Younger have been thought to act positively and negatively in this segment. Many evaluate Father positively according to what they infer him to be doing with the order. Father: forgives and reinstates Younger (Bailey, Blomberg, Etchells, Forbes, Hultgren, Jeremias, Linnemann, Rohrbaugh, and Trench) (Table 3, row 8); elevates Younger to a higher status (Donahue) (Table 3, row 9); nourishes Younger with a feast (Scott) (Table 3, row 11); wants all to share in his joy (Etchells, Levine, and Trench) (Table 3, row 12); reconciles Younger to the village (Bailey, Blomberg, and Forbes) (Table 3, row 13); reconciles the family to the village (Rohrbaugh) (Table 3, row 14); recognizes Younger’s return as grounds for celebration (Linnemann) (Table 3, row 15); and speaks in poetry out of joy (Ramsey) (Table 3, row 16).

or amoral reasoning to escape punishment (the Prodigal, the Steward, and the Judge).
A few find fault with Father in this segment. Breech and Ford infer that Father enjoys indulging and being needed by Younger (Table 3, row 28); Schottroff, that Father is treating Younger better than Elder (Table 3, row 29).

As for Younger, some credit him and some fault him. It might be noted that nothing is explicitly stated about Younger after 15:21—no sort of response to his father’s command is reported. Bailey and Via infer that Younger accepts the graciousness of his father (Table 3, row 42) and Bailey further infers that Younger recognizes that he broke relationships and has no power to fix them (Table 3, row 43). Levine suggests that Younger is to be faulted because he does not reconcile with his brother (Table 3, row 59). While not all of these construals are altogether equally adequate to the text, there is surely grounds for mutually exclusive inferences in this text segment.

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15 Ramsey (“Plots,” 41-42), Levine (Short Stories by Jesus, 65), and Tolbert (Perspectives on the Parables, 105) all point this out.

16 Levine only hints in this direction when she notes that Elder has been ignored “by both the reinstated brother and the happy father” (Short Stories by Jesus, 67). While it is not my goal to argue for any one reading, this is a construal that has not received its due in studies of the parable. It is certainly plausible that authorial audiences will have thought that the onus was on Younger to reconcile with his brother. Many today fault Elder for not celebrating his brother’s return (Table 3, rows 64-65) but do not hold Younger to account. Assuming a reading with a positive Father and a sinful-but-now-reconciled Younger, Younger offends and Younger experiences his father’s graciousness: perhaps, then, Younger is to be expected to take the initiative to make amends with his brother. After all, he is the offending party. Moreover the experience of his father’s graciousness might make him ready to seek forgiveness. In Younger’s plan (15:17-19), he decides to say to his father that he has “sinned against heaven and before you [his father]”; he never acknowledges having sinned against his brother. The text construed thus, it might be argued that an appeal is being made to the already forgiven ones: the forgiven are being prompted to seek forgiveness from others they have offended. The forgiven are being shown that there are still harms resulting from their offenses, disharmony like that between the Elder and his father.

Lischer writes that “because the older son cannot reconcile with his brother, he has no choice but to turn his back on his father” (Reading the Parables, 99, 100):

The story is only completed when all those who have been found are reconciled to one another. But the elder son doesn’t have it in him to put his arms around his
2.2.4 The Discrepancy between Younger’s Planned and Delivered Statements (15:18-19, 21-22) (Table 4, Row 7)

Many have noted the discrepancy between Younger’s planned statement (15:18-19) and his delivered statement (15:21-22). The delivered statement is word-for-word the same as the planned statement but the imperative at the end, “make me like one of your hired workers,” is absent in the delivered statement. There are four viable ways to explain this. Blomberg, Donahue, Hultgren, Jeremias, Levine, Lischer, Ramsey, and Wright infer that Father cuts off Younger’s speech—and they judge this a gracious act of Father (Table 3, row 10). Hedrick faults Father for cutting off Younger’s confession—inferring that Father is so eager to pamper the young one that he cannot even wait for the entire expression of contrition (Table 3, row 27). Bailey, Forbes, Schottroff, and Trench credit Younger for gracefully emending his speech—they infer that Younger realizes that the request to be made a hired worker is inappropriate given Father’s reception (Table 3, row 41). Breech faults Younger for emending his speech, inferring that he does so out of self-interested calculation—he is already getting better than he expected so he holds his tongue (Table 3, row 58). A reader with an elevated standard of coherence will want to

brother and to kiss him. The ecstasy of being found is ‘squandered,’ to use a good Lukan word (15:13), by the elder brother’s failure to love. For lack of reconciliation, the story remains open-ended, unfinished, and sad. We can hear the music, but it is distant and someone is missing. It may be instead that the audience is left to wonder whether Younger will go out to Elder. Donahue construes the ending of the parable as a challenge (Gospel in Parable, 162):

The parable of Luke 15:11-32, however, is open-ended and leaves us with a challenge. It does not tell us whether the older brother joined the celebration. It does not tell us whether he chose reconciliation over alienation or whether he continued to live as a slave, or accepted the risk of freedom. Its final words are an invitation; will it be accepted?"

Surely the challenge may fall upon Younger and those who identify with the reconciled, as in, Can the reconciled take the initiative to reconcile with their peers? Can Father’s compassionate acceptance change Younger into an agent of reconciliation?
make sense of the discrepancy between the planned and delivered speeches, and it is reasonable to find coherence in these mutually exclusive ways.

2.2.5 Elder’s Learning of the Celebration (15:24-26) (Table 4, Row 8)

The final case is slightly different from the others; one alternative is represented in Tables 2 and 3 and the other is not. The text segment in question is 15:24-26, and at issue is the manner in which Elder learns of the celebration. Breech, Hedrick, and Levine fault Father, inferring that he should have sent for Elder but did not (Table 3, row 30); Elder is left to continue working and later to wander upon the party and to learn about it from a slave/boy. The alternative to this reading does not involve an evaluative construal of one of the three principal characters and so is not represented in the tables. The alternative construal—which has become the standard—is as follows, in Linnemann’s words:

The narrator has the elder son come to the house only when the feast is already in progress. Even the dance of the men, which usually follows a festal meal, must already have begun, so that the rejoicing and the din can be heard outside, and the protest of the son against the feast is expressed as a refusal to go in. This is not a reflection of real life but stage-management by the narrator. Only in this way can the point be added that the father goes out to the elder as he ran to meet the younger, so that the same gesture of love is again repeated.17

Arland J. Hultgren likewise infers that the apparent oddity of Elder not being informed results from the author’s intention to heighten the drama:

It is strange that [Elder] was not told immediately about the return of his brother. The first he hears of it is when he approaches the house and hears what is going on (“music and dancing”). But such a detail provides for a more dramatic emotional scene to follow. When he is told of the reason for the celebration (15:27), he becomes angry—the opposite of the rejoicing going on inside—and refuses to enter. The father, risking humiliation and shame, leaves his guests

17 Linnemann, Parables of Jesus, 79. “Din” here seems needlessly pejorative, unless it is to reflect the perspective of Elder.
inside the house, goes outdoors, and pleads with the elder son to come in and join the celebration.\textsuperscript{18}

The standard claim, then, consists of the inference that the author allows a measure of storyworld discontinuity in order to create a more compelling scene shortly thereafter. This is possible. At the same time, it is similarly adequate to the text to infer that Elder should have been invited in the normal course of things and that the oversight reflects something amiss in Father, the host of the celebration.\textsuperscript{19}

\textsuperscript{18} Hultgren, \textit{Parables of Jesus}, 80. Likewise, Scott, “How is it possible that the elder would be uninformed of the younger’s return, the father’s welcome, and the feast? Such a question ignores the art of fiction. The line is contrived, stage-managed, but in order to locate this character in his proper place in the story” (\textit{Hear Then the Parable}, 119).

Trench, quick to observe many subtle points, passes over this in silence, and even finds occasion to fault further Elder. Elder inquires about the celebration rather than entering immediately, as Trench writes (\textit{Parables of our Lord}, 317):

He does not at once go in; he does not take for granted that when his father makes a feast there is matter worthy of making merry about. But, as if already resolved to mislike what is proceeding, he prefers to remain without, and to learn from a servant the occasion of the joy; or, as he himself significantly puts it, ‘what these things meant.’

\textsuperscript{19} It is not my goal to settle this matter. Indeed, I maintain that there is allowance for divergent inferences here and elsewhere. But I am troubled by the routine, credulous acceptance of the far-from-conclusive construal that this is “stage-management” and not a mistake on the father’s part. I offer, then, three lines of support for the latter position:

1. the context in Luke supports the inference that an invitation should have been made and was not: not only is inviting guests topical in Luke 14, but even in the two parables of Luke 15 preceding PS, both the man and the woman explicitly call together their friends and neighbors (15:6, 9). The invitation of guests may be taken as topical in this part of the gospel, rendering the absence of an invitation to Elder remarkable;

2. irony may be detected in the phrasing of 15:24-25. In direct discourse, Father, having commanded the slaves, concludes in poetic parallelism:

\begin{quote}

\begin{verbatim}
ὅτι οὗτος ὁ υἱός μου νεκρὸς ἦν καὶ ἀνέζησεν,
 ἦν ἀπολολὼς καὶ εὐρέθη.
\end{verbatim}
\end{quote}

The narrator then reports: καὶ ἦρξαν εὐφραίνεσθαι. Ἡν δὲ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ πρεσβύτερος ἐν ἄγῳ. In this brief span of text there are three instances of ἦν and two instances of ὁ υἱός. When Father speaks about Younger, the style is elevated—there is poetic parallelism—and what is predicated of the son is
2.3 The Presentation of Inferences in Parable Studies

Throughout this chapter I have argued that there is allowance for not only a variety of inferences but also for divergent, even opposing inferences at several points in PS. Before moving on, it is worthwhile to recognize three issues concerning the presentation of inferences in parable studies. Three practices create confusion.

First, inferences often go unacknowledged. For example, many reading that Father saw Younger “while he was still a long way off” (15:20) infer that Father had been watching for his son. But this inference is presented in a variety of ways, none making explicit the inferencing, as in the following:

1. “Yet we get the impression that the father is waiting for the child’s return: when the son is still far off, the father sees him. Perhaps he had been watching the road rather than his estate or his account books” (Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 59);

2. “While his son was still ‘far off,’ his father saw him (does this mean he had regularly been on the lookout for him?)” (Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 120);

abstract, profound—was dead and lives, was lost and is found. When the narrator speaks of Elder, it is altogether prosaic: the style is not heightened and the content is literal, mundane (was in the field). Moreover, speaking of Younger, Father says, ὁ υἱὸς μου; in the narrators statement, this phrasing is replicated, ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ, and then the defining attribute is added at the end, i.e., ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ πρεσβύτερος. In other words, if καὶ ἔρξαι εὐφραίνεσθαι is omitted, a rough translation of the Greek yields:

“for this son of mine dead was and lives, was lost and is found.”

Was, however, the son of him, the elder one, in the field.

Irony may thus be inferred, arising from the contrast between the narrator’s statement and Father’s; the narrator’s statement undercuts Father’s as if there is something amiss;

3. a motive for Father is readily inferable. Bailey, in fact, who subscribes to the “stage-management” reading, nevertheless entertains the possibility of Father having a motive not to invite Elder: “At the same time, there are good reasons for not notifying him. Doubtless the father knows that the older brother will be upset and, if notified, may even try to prevent the banquet” (*Poet and Peasant*, 192). There are roughly equivalent textual grounds for imputing a motive to the father as there are for imputing a motive to the author. Both positions require an inference, neither is more text-based and neither is more adequate to the text.
3. “However, it almost appears as though the father is waiting for him. He sees his son at a distance” (Forbes, *God of Old*, 138); and

4. “How would he have even seen his son ‘while he was still a long way off’ (Lk 15:20), if he had not been regularly looking for him down the road by which he had left?” (Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 208).

Instead of *inferencing*, these commentators write of “impressions” or “appearances” or ask rhetorical questions. While it might be impracticable to write of “inferencing” in every case, as this will be tiring for the reader, phrasing that conceals the presence of an inference risks confusion.

Second, the degree of speculation in an inference is sometimes concealed. Some inferences are relatively nonspeculative, for example, the inference just discussed—that Father was watching for Younger. Indeed, for a reader with anything more than a lax standard of coherence, some sort of inference will be necessary for the maintenance of coherence in the processing of the statement that Father saw Younger while he was still a long way off. That Father had been watching is a readily available inference—it is perhaps the simplest way to make sense of the text. Moreover, it is effective compositionally: the text prompts the inference and the reader finds the realization (*Oh, he’s been watching for his son!*) satisfying.\(^\text{20}\)

But some inferences are more speculative. For example, Levine, in the quotation just presented, infers not only that Father was watching for Younger but also speculates that, preoccupied with watching for Younger, Father neglects “his estate or his account books.” This is possible, but there is less in the text to support this additional inference.

\(^{20}\) Alternatively, it might be inferred that Younger was crying out in agony because of his miserable situation—crying loudly. This would explain why Father saw him a long way off, but it is less compositionally effective and less consistent with the parable’s presentation of the event in terms of the father’s agency.
Yet Levine presents the two inferences as though they are of equal authority or are equally text-warranted. They are not. Concealing the degree of speculation in an inference again risks confusion.

Finally, the importance of inferencing in text reception is sometimes not recognized. As I have tried to show throughout this chapter, readers sometimes envision very different stories because of the inferences they make. But inferencing is sometimes disparaged. For example, in his list of eleven “regular practices for good interpretation of texts,” Snodgrass writes:

Interpret what is given, not what is omitted. Any attempt to interpret a parable based on what is not there is almost certainly wrong. All parables—as all other written material—have gaps, jumps that the author feels are safe to make without loss of understanding. The more attention one gives to what is not there without evidence that the author intended some conclusion to be drawn the more one is almost certainly wrong. Note the gap between Luke 15:21 and 22. The father ran out to meet the son and, after the son’s statement, gave a command to the servants. Did the servants run out with him, or before the request have the father and son returned to the house? From the teller’s perspective it does not matter, and to give attention to such a detail would be pedantic and diminish the drama. What matters is the meeting and the command to start the celebration.21

This prescription in the main trivializes inference-making, and there are three problems with it. First, the distinction between “what is given” and “what is omitted” is misleading. Even in terms of the example Snodgrass presents, it is the very pursuit to understand “what is given” that leads to inferencing. Luke 15:20-22 describes, as Snodgrass reports, “The father ran out to meet the son and, after the son’s statement, gave a command to the servants.” A reader with a relatively elevated standard of coherence may be expected to experience a coherence breakdown reading Luke 15:20-22. If, for example, one attempts to imagine “what is given” as a continuous scene playing out, the

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21 Snodgrass, Stories with Intent, 25, 29.
question of the proximity of the slaves to the father will have to be dealt with. In the first place, then, it is not a matter of attending to “what is given” rather than “what is omitted,” it is a question of making sense—finding coherence—in what is given.

Second, when Snodgrass writes, “From the teller’s perspective it does not matter” and “What matters is the meeting and the command to start the celebration,” he is himself making an inference without acknowledging it. He judges that certain things “matter,” and he presents his judgement as a matter of fact, but he can only guess “the teller’s perspective” by way of inference. From the fact that the teller does not explicitly report how the slaves are near Father, and from the conclusion that it would not materially change the story whether the slaves went with Father or whether Father returned to the slaves, Snodgrass infers that the question of the slaves’ proximity to Father did not matter to the storyteller and so should not matter to the audience. Snodgrass solves the problem of storyworld coherence by appealing to authorial motive (for the teller, it did not matter one way or another, and to have explicitly indicated something about the slaves will have made the composition less economical). While Snodgrass’s inference might be a good one, his presentation mischaracterizes things as if Snodgrass knows “what matters” while others are bogged down in “what is omitted.”

Finally, while Snodgrass allows that there is sometimes “evidence that the author intended some conclusion to be drawn,” he does not give due treatment to this possibility. He presents only the example of the question of the slaves’ proximity, an example from which (to his mind, anyway) no conclusion is to be drawn. Snodgrass gives attention only to the presence of “gaps, jumps that the author feels are safe to make without loss of understanding.” His prescription, as he presents it, implies that inference-making deals in
trivialities and is usually unproductive to reception. The entirety of this chapter points in the opposite direction: at least concerning PS, inference-making is an integral part of reception.

3. A New Inference: PS is Intended for Aesthetic Transaction

I have argued above that PS is characterized by measured disclosure and so that there is an allowance for divergent inferences concerning story-defining matters. The states and changes of affairs that readers envision differ depending on the inferences they make, especially concerning Younger’s request and Father’s compliance (15:12), Younger’s planning (15:17-19), the import of Father’s address to his slaves (15:22-24), the discrepancy between what Younger plans to say and what he actually says (15:18-19, 21-22), and the manner in which Elder learns of his brother’s return and the subsequent celebration (15:24-26). This is interesting in itself, and I hope that the tables I have developed will be helpful to anyone exploring studies of PS. But this has also been the first step in a two-part argument.

There is no reason to infer that the allowance for divergent, story-defining inferences in PS reflects deficiency on the author’s part, as though the author meant for matters to be more certain but failed in his composition. There is also no reason to infer that the allowance reflects a deficiency in modern audiences, as though modern audiences lack decisive knowledge, knowledge that would have been common among authorial audiences and will have compelled certain inferences.22 Instead, the allowance for

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22 This may be the case concerning Younger’s request and Father’s compliance—there may be decisive knowledge modern audiences lack. But it is far from certain that any decisive knowledge existed, was held in common among authorial audiences. At any rate, there are four other major instances of allowance.
inferences provides grounds for the following inference: *PS is intended to be received in an aesthetic mode.*

The parable theories discussed in Chapter 1 do not fit PS. Readers may make allegorical connections in their attempts to maintain coherence in their encounters with PS, and they may make allegorical connections as they draw on their envisionments throughout life, but given the allowance for inferences, PS is not created as an allegory. Readers may experience metaphorical shocks in their encounters with PS, but the allowance rules out the conclusion that the story is meant to produce one certain, definite shock. Readers may experience themselves addressed and persuaded in their encounters with the text, but, again, the allowance for inferences is not consistent with specific argumentation and rhetoric—as though the text were meant to persuade an audience of, or move an audience to one certain, definite thing. PS may be called “art,” but then “art” would have to be defined. Rather than be side-tracked with a discussion of art as such, I mean instead to develop a notion of *aesthetic reception* and to describe PS as a counterpart to a person reading in an aesthetic mode. This is the task of Chapter 4, to which I now turn.
The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)
Drama Format

NARRATOR: (11) ἄνθρωπος της εἶχεν δύο υἱοὺς. (12) καὶ εἶπεν ὁ νεώτερος αὐτῶν τῷ πατρί.

YOUNGER ONE: πάτερ, δός μοι τὸ ἐπιβάλλον μέρος τῆς οὐσίας.

NARRATOR: ὃ δὲ διείλεν αὐτοῖς τὸν βίον. (13) καὶ μετ’ αὐτῶν πολλάς ἡμέρας συναγαγὼν πάντα ὁ νεώτερος υἱὸς ἀπεδήμησεν εἰς χώραν μακρὰν καὶ ἐκεῖ διεσκόρπισεν τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτοῦ ζῶν ἀσύτως. (14) δαπανήσαντος δὲ αὐτοῦ πάντα ἐγένετο λιμὸς ἰσχυρά κατὰ τὴν χώραν ἐκείνην, καὶ αὐτὸς ἥρξατο υπερείσθαι. (15) καὶ πορευθεὶς ἐκολλήθη ἕν τῶν πολιτῶν τῆς χώρας ἐκείνης, καὶ ἐπεμψεν αὐτὸν εἰς τοὺς ἀγροὺς αὐτοῦ βόσκειν χοίρους, (16) καὶ ἐπεθύμησεν ἀργαλεῖα ἐκ τῶν κερατιῶν ὁν ἔστησαν οἱ χοῖροι, καὶ οὐδεὶς ἐδίδοι αὐτῷ. (17) εἰς ἑαυτὸν δὲ ἐλθόν ἔφη:

YOUNGER ONE: πόσοι μίσθιοι τοῦ πατρός μου περισσεύονται ἄρτων, ἐγὼ δὲ λιμῷ ὧν ἀπόλλυμαι. (18) ἀναστὰς πορεύσομαι πρὸς τὸν πατέρα μου καὶ ἔρω αὐτῷ. πάτερ, ἡμαρτον εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐνώπιον σου, (19) οὐκέτι εἰμι ἄξιος κληθῆναι υἱός σου· ποίησόν με ὡς ἕνα τῶν μισθίων σου.

NARRATOR: (20) καὶ ἀναστὰς ἦλθεν πρὸς τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ. Ἔτι δὲ αὐτοῦ μακρὰν ἀπέχοντος εἶδεν αὐτὸν ὁ πατὴρ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐσπλαγχνισθη καὶ δραμὼν ἐπέπεσεν ἐπὶ τὸν πάτραμ μοι καὶ κατεφίλησεν αὐτόν. (21) εἶπεν δὲ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτῷ·

YOUNGER ONE: πάτερ, ἡμαρτον εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν καὶ ἐνώπιον σου, οὐκέτι εἰμι ἄξιος κληθῆναι υἱός σου.

NARRATOR: (22) εἶπεν δὲ ὁ πατὴρ πρὸς τοὺς δοῦλος αὐτοῦ·

FATHER: ταχὺ ἐξενέγκατε στολήν τὴν πρώτην καὶ ἐνδύσατε αὐτόν, καὶ δότε δακτύλιον εἰς τὴν χεῖρα αὐτοῦ καὶ ὑποδήματα εἰς τῶν πόδας, (23) καὶ φέρετε τὸν μόσχον τὸν στενοῦν, θύσατε, καὶ φαγόντες εὐφραίνωμεν, (24) ὅτι οὕτως ὁ υἱὸς μου νεκρός ἦν καὶ ἀνέζησεν, ἦν ἀπολωλός καὶ εὐρέθη.

NARRATOR: καὶ ἡμαρτόν εὐφραίνεσθαι. (25) Ἡν δὲ ὁ υἱὸς αὐτοῦ ὁ πρεσβύτερος ἐν ἀγρῷ· καὶ ὡς ἐρχόμενος ἤγγισεν τῇ οἰκίᾳ, ἤκουσεν συμφωνίας καὶ χορῶν, (26) καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος ἔνα τῶν παιδῶν ἐπυνθάνετο τί ἐν εἰς ταῦτα. (27) δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ ὅτι
SLAVE: ο ἀδελφὸς σου ἦκει, καὶ ἔθυσεν ὁ πατήρ σου τὸν μόσχον τὸν σιτευτὸν, ὅτι ύγιαίνοντα αὐτὸν ἀπέλαβεν.

NARRATOR: (28) ὤργίσθη δὲ καὶ οὐχ ἦθελεν εἰσελθεῖν, ὁ δὲ πατήρ αὐτοῦ ἔξελθὼν παρεκάλει αὐτὸν. (29) ὁ δὲ ἀποκριθεὶς εἶπεν τῷ πατρὶ αὐτοῦ.

ELDER ONE: ἰδοὺ τοσαῦτα ἔτη δουλεύω σοι καὶ οὐδέποτε ἔντολήν σου παρῆλθον, καὶ ἐμοὶ οὐδέποτε ἔδωκας ἐρήμων σου τῶν φίλων μου εὐφρανθῶ. (30) ὅτε δὲ ὁ γεύμας σου οὕτως ἔκαθος σοι καὶ οἰκοφαγῶν σοι τὸν βίον μετὰ πορνῶν ἠλθεῖ, ἔθυσας αὐτῷ τὸν σιτευτὸν μόσχον.

NARRATOR: (31) ὁ δὲ εἶπεν αὐτῷ.

FATHER: τέκνον, σὺ πάντοτε μετ᾽ ἐμοῦ εἶ, καὶ πάντα τὰ ἐμὰ σὰ ἐστίν. (32) εὐφρανθῆσαι δὲ καὶ χαρῆναι ἔθει, ὅτι ὁ ἀδελφὸς σου οὕτως νεκρὸς ἦν καὶ ἔζησεν, καὶ ἀπολυθὼς καὶ εὐρέθη.
Table 2: Readings of The Prodigal Son Arranged According to the Permutations of Evaluative Construals of Father, Younger, and Elder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Father</th>
<th>Younger</th>
<th>Elder</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Proponents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>Δ</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 158-206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blomberg, <em>Interpreting</em>, 197-211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Donahue, <em>Gospel in Parable</em>, 151-62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Etchells, <em>A Reading</em>, 29-33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Forbes, <em>God of Old</em>, 127-51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hultgren, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 70-91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Lischer, <em>Reading the Parables</em>, 97-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Snodgrass, <em>Stories with Intent</em>, 117-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trench, <em>Parables of our Lord</em>, 298-323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wright, <em>Jesus the Storyteller</em>, 118-23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Holgate, <em>Prodigality</em>, 131-246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jeremias, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 128-32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Jones, <em>Art and Truth</em>, 167-205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Linnemann, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 73-81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Via, <em>Parables</em>, 162-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Ramsey, “Plots,” 33-42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Δ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Tolbert, <em>Perspectives</em>, 97-107</td>
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</table>

**POSITIVE**

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<tr>
<th>+</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>+</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>Δ</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
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<td>-</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>20</td>
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**MIXED/DYNAMIC**

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<td>11</td>
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<td>Δ</td>
<td>15</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
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**NEGATIVE**

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<td>22</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>Δ</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>-</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>27</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Evaluative Construals of Segments of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character Evaluation</th>
<th>#</th>
<th>Claim</th>
<th>Basis in Luke 15</th>
<th>Proponents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FATHER +</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>allows son to discover error through experience</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>• Trench, <em>Parables of our Lord</em>, 301</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
|                      | 2 | is patient/loving in complying with request | 12 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 161, 165-68  
  • Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 203-4 |
|                      | 3 | is generous to his workers | 17 | • Etchells, *A Reading*, 29 |
|                      | 4 | is moved with compassion at the sight of younger son | 20 | • Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 155  
  • Etchells, *A Reading*, 31  
  • Forbes, *God of Old*, 138  
  • Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 78  
  • Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 59  
  • Ramsey, “Plots,” 35  
  • Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 120 |
|                      | 5 | runs out to, embraces, and kisses younger son out of love/joy/compassion | 20 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 181  
  • Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 204  
  • Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 155  
  • Etchells, *A Reading*, 31  
  • Forbes, *God of Old*, 138-39  
  • Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 79  
  • Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 60-61  
  • Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus*, 77  
  • Lischer, *Reading the Parables*, 98  
  • Ramsey, “Plots,” 35  
  • Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 118  
  • Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, 101, 103  
  • Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 311-12  
  • Via, *Parables*, 171, 172, 176  
  • Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 120 |
|                      | 6 | protects son from angry villagers | 20 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 181-82  
  • Forbes, *God of Old*, 139  
  • Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 79-80  
  • Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 156 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>prevents son from kneeling with embrace</th>
<th>20</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>forgives and reinstates son</td>
<td>20-24</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>symbolically elevates son beyond restoration</td>
<td>20-24</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>cuts off son’s speech</td>
<td>18-19, 21-22</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>nourishes son with a feast</td>
<td>23-24</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>wants all to share in his joy by having feast/celebration</td>
<td>23-24</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reconciles son to village with feast</td>
<td>23-24</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reconciles family to village with feast</td>
<td>23-24</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>recognizes the son’s return as grounds for celebration</td>
<td>23-24</td>
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<td>speaks in poetry out of joy</td>
<td>24</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>has good relationship with his servants</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>goes out to elder son and comforts/urges him</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>has good relationship with his servants</td>
<td>27</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Hultgren, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 78-79</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Linnemann, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 77</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 184-85</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Blomberg, <em>Interpreting the Parables</em>, 207</td>
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<td>Etchells, <em>A Reading</em>, 31</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Forbes, <em>God of Old</em>, 140</td>
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<td>Hultgren, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 79</td>
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<td>Jeremias, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 130</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Linnemann, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 77</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 157</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Trench, <em>Parables of our Lord</em>, 314-16</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Donahue, <em>Gospel in Parable</em>, 155-56</td>
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<td>Blomberg, <em>Interpreting the Parables</em>, 204, 208</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Donahue, <em>Gospel in Parable</em>, 155</td>
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<td>Hultgren, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 79</td>
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<td>Jeremias, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 130</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Levine, <em>Short Stories by Jesus</em>, 64</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Lischer, <em>Reading the Parables</em>, 98</td>
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<td>Ramsey, “Plots,” 35</td>
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<td>Wright, <em>Jesus the Storyteller</em>, 120</td>
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<td>Scott, <em>Hear Then the Parable</em>, 118</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Etchells, <em>A Reading</em>, 31-32</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Levine, <em>Short Stories by Jesus</em>, 64</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Trench, Parable of our Lord, 316</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 186-87</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Blomberg, <em>Interpreting the Parables</em>, 207</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Forbes, <em>God of Old</em>, 140</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional family,” 157-58</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Linnemann, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 78-79</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>addresses elder son tenderly</td>
<td>31</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>reassures elder son of his place in the family, his status concerning the inheritance</td>
<td>31</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>attempts to foster relationship between elder and younger, saying “this brother of yours.”</td>
<td>32</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Etchells, *A Reading*, 32
- Forbes, *God of Old*, 142
- Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 80
- Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 68
- Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus*, 79
- Lischer, *Reading the Parables*, 99
- Ramsey, “Plots,” 35
- Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 160
- Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 120
- Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, 101
- Via, *Parables*, 171
- Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 122

- Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 200
- Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 157
- Forbes, *God of Old*, 143
- Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 81
- Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 131
- Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 72-73
- Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 162
- Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 121-22
- Trench, *Parables of Jesus*, 319
| FATHER | | 22 | addresses son directly (cf. Luke 15:22-25) | \(\text{31-32}\) | • Lischer, *Reading the Parables*, 99  
• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 162  
• Schottroff, *Parables of Jesus*, 144  
• Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 319  
• Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 73 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 23 | divides his property during life | \(\text{12}\) | \(\text{12-13}\) | • Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 190  
• Ford, *Parables of Jesus*, 97-98, 102  
• Hedrick, *Many Things in Parables*, 40-41  
• Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 51-52  
• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 151  
• Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 111 |
| 24 | precipitates son’s fall | \(\text{12-13}\) | • Ford, *Parables of Jesus*, 102-3 |
| 25 | complicit in younger son’s dissolute living | \(\text{12-13}\) | • Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 54-55 |
| 26 | runs | \(\text{20}\) | • Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 196-97  
• Hedrick, *Many Things in Parables*, 40 |
| 27 | interrupts son’s confession | \(\text{18-19, 21-22}\) | • Hedrick, *Many Things in Parables*, 40 |
| 28 | enjoys indulging/being needed by younger son | \(\text{20-24}\) | • Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 198  
• Ford, *Parables of Jesus*, 103 |
| 29 | treats younger better than elder | \(\text{23}\) | • Schottroff, *Parables of Jesus*, 143-44 |
| 30 | does not send for elder son | \(\text{24-26}\) | • Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 199  
• Hedrick, *Many Things in Parables*, 41  
• Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 67 |
| 31 | reinstatement of younger son makes claim “all that is mine is yours” dubious | \(\text{22, 31}\) | • Schottroff, *Parables of Jesus*, 143-44 |
| 32 | misunderstands elder son’s anger/complaint | \(\text{31-32}\) | • Breech, *Silences of Jesus*, 204-5  
• Hedrick, *Many Things in Parables*, 41 |
| UN | GE | 33 | emigrates to seek economic betterment | \(\text{12-13}\) | • Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus*, 75  
• Schottroff, *Parables of Jesus*, 140 |
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| 34 | acts to save his life by joining himself to citizen | 15 | • Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 56-57  
• Schottroff, *Parables of Jesus*, 141 |
| 35 | experiences humility (plans to be hired worker) | 17-19 | • Etchells, *A Reading*, 29-30  
• Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 116-17 |
| 36 | recognizes his sinfulness | 17-19 | • Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 206  
• Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 154  
• Forbes, *God of Old*, 136-37  
• Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus*, 76  
• Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 116-17  
• Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 310  
• Via, *Parables*, 168 |
| 37 | recognizes his foolishness | 17-19 | • Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 76 |
| 38 | plans/acts to save his life | 17-19 | • Schottroff, *Parables of Jesus*, 141 |
| 39 | recognizes his ability to act to resolve problem | 17-19 | • Via, *Parables*, 168-69 |
| 40 | recognizes the generosity of his father | 17-19 | • Etchells, *A Reading*, 30-31 |
| 41 | gracefully emends speech in response to reception | 18-19, 21-22 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 183-84  
• Forbes, *God of Old*, 139  
• Schottroff, *Parables of Jesus*, 143  
• Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 313-14 |
| 42 | accepts graciousness of father | 20-24 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 183  
• Via, *Parables*, 171 |
| 43 | recognizes he broke relationships and is powerless to heal them | 20-24 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 183 |

**YOUNGER**

<p>| | | |</p>
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<thead>
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</table>
| 44 | requests inheritance while father lives | 12 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 161-65  
• Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 203  
• Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 189-90  
• Forbes, *God of Old*, 132-33  
• Ford, *Parables of Jesus*, 97  
• Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 73  
• Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 51-53  
• Lischer, *Reading the Parables*, 98  
• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional
| 45 | seeks independence from father/God | 12 | • Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 300-301 |
| 46 | deserts family and responsibility for them by liquidating property and leaving | 13 | • Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 190-91  
• Forbes, *God of Old*, 133  
• Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 73, 77  
• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 151-53  
• Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 113  
• Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 119 |
| 47 | deserts God | 13 | • Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 302 |
| 48 | squanders inheritance in dissolute living | 13 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 170, 176-77  
• Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 205-6  
• Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 191-93  
• Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 153, 154  
• Etchells, *A Reading*, 30  
• Forbes, *God of Old*, 133-34  
• Ford, *Parables of Jesus*, 102-3  
• Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 75  
• Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 54  
• Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus*, 75  
• Lischer, *Reading the Parables*, 98  
• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 153  
• Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 116  
• Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, 101, 102  
• Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 303  
• Via, *Parables*, 165 |
| 49 | attaches himself to non-Jew | 15 | • Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 153  
• Forbes, *God of Old*, 134  
• Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus*, 75-76  
• Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 116  
• Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, 102  
• Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 119 |
<p>| 50 | attaches himself to a | 15 | • Trench, <em>Parables of our Lord</em>, 304 |</p>
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<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>citizen of the godless realm</td>
<td>15-16</td>
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<td></td>
<td>tends to swine</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>is reduced to animal/loses humanity</td>
<td>16</td>
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<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>steals food</td>
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<td>54</td>
<td>plans to manipulate father with feigned contrition</td>
<td>17-19</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>interior monologue aligns him with morally suspect characters in other parables</td>
<td>17-19</td>
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<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>wants to have a relationship of servility with father</td>
<td>17-19</td>
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<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>wants to maintain pride and avoid reconciliation with father and brother</td>
<td>17-19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58</td>
<td>emends speech due to self-interested calculation</td>
<td>18-19, 21-22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>59</td>
<td>does not reconcile with brother</td>
<td>20-24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ELDER</td>
<td>+ 60</td>
<td>is a dutiful son</td>
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- Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 170-71
- Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 153
- Etchells, *A Reading*, 30
- Forbes, *God of Old*, 134
- Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 75
- Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 129
- Linnehan, *Parables of Jesus*, 76
- Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 153
- Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 116
- Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, 102
- Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 305
- Wright, *Jesus the Storyteller*, 119
- Etchells, *A Reading*, 30
- Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 75
- Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 115
- Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 129-30
- Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 194-96
- Ramsey, “Plots,” 40
- Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 197
- Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 58
- Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 157
- Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 176-79
- Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 197
- Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 67
- Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 200
- Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 209
- Breech, *Silence of Jesus*, 199-200, 202
- Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 157
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<tr>
<th>ELDER</th>
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<tr>
<td>61</td>
<td>has righteous indignation for sake of his father</td>
<td>29-30</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Etchells, <em>A Reading</em>, 30</td>
<td>• Breech, <em>Silence of Jesus</em>, 203-4</td>
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<td>• Forbes, <em>God of Old</em>, 149</td>
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<td>• Hedrick, <em>Many Things in Parables</em>, 41</td>
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<td>• Hultgren, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 80</td>
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<td>• Levine, <em>Short Stories by Jesus</em>, 67, 71</td>
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<td>• Lischer, <em>Reading the Parables</em>, 99</td>
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<td>• Trench, <em>Parables of our Lord</em>, 317</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Wright, <em>Jesus the Storyteller</em>, 122</td>
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<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>does not protest brother’s request or act to reconcile family</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Forbes, <em>God of Old</em>, 133</td>
<td>• Trench, <em>Parables of our Lord</em>, 317</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 151</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>asks about celebration</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 194</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Trench, <em>Parables of our Lord</em>, 317</td>
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<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>becomes angry and does not want to enter celebration</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>• Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 194</td>
<td>• Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 194-95</td>
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<td>• Donahue, <em>Gospel in Parable</em>, 156</td>
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<td>• Etchells, <em>A Reading</em>, 31-32</td>
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<td>• Hultgren, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 80</td>
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<td>• Ramsey, “Plots,” 36</td>
<td>• Ramsey, “Plots,” 36</td>
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<td>• Rohrbaugh, Dysfunctional Family,” 158</td>
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<td>• Schottroff, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 44</td>
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<td>• Scott, <em>Hear then the Parable</em>, 120</td>
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<td>• Tolbert, <em>Perspectives on the Parables</em>, 104</td>
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<td>• Trench, <em>Parables of our Lord</em>, 318</td>
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<td>• Wright, <em>Jesus the Storyteller</em>, 121</td>
<td>• Wright, <em>Jesus the Storyteller</em>, 121</td>
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<td>65</td>
<td>does not rejoice at news of brother’s return</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td>• Hultgren, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 82</td>
<td>• Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 194-95</td>
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<td>• Jeremias, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 131</td>
<td>• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 159</td>
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<td>• Levine, <em>Short Stories by Jesus</em>, 67</td>
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<td>• Trench, <em>Parables of our Lord</em>, 318</td>
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<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>fails to perform duties of elder son during celebration</td>
<td>28</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 194-95</td>
<td>• Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 194-95</td>
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<td>• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 159</td>
<td>• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 159</td>
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<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>addresses father in non-respectful/affectionate manner (cf. younger son’s addresses)</td>
<td>29</td>
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<td>• Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 196</td>
<td>• Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 196</td>
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<td>• Donahue, <em>Gospel in Parable</em>, 156</td>
<td>• Donahue, <em>Gospel in Parable</em>, 156</td>
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<td>• Forbes, <em>God of Old</em>, 143</td>
<td>• Forbes, <em>God of Old</em>, 143</td>
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<td>• Hultgren, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 81</td>
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| 68   | is arrogant/self-righteous, exaggerates own goodness | 29 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 197  
• Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 157  
• Etchells, *A Reading*, 29, 32  
• Forbes, *God of Old*, 143  
• Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 121  
• Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, 104 |
| 69   | is childish/selfish/jealous | 29 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 198  
• Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 208  
• Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables*, 104 |
| 70   | wants celebration without family | 29 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 198-99  
• Forbes, *God of Old*, 143 |
| 71   | relates to father in terms of servility | 29 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 196-97  
• Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 157  
• Forbes, *God of Old*, 142, 143  
• Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 320 |
| 72   | does not recognize the generosity of his father | 29 | • Etchells, *A Reading*, 31 |
| 73   | does not recognize appropriateness of celebration | 29-30 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 199  
• Linnemann, *Parables of Jesus*, 79 |
| 74   | complains while guests are present (insulting father) | 29-30 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 195-96  
• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 160-61 |
| 75   | relates to father in terms of merit/reward rather than love/grace | 29-30 | • Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 80  
• Via, *Parables*, 171  
• Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 321 |
| 76   | refers to brother as “this son of yours” | 30 | • Bailey, *Poet and Peasant*, 198-99  
• Blomberg, *Interpreting the Parables*, 208  
• Donahue, *Gospel in Parable*, 157  
• Forbes, *God of Old*, 143  
• Hultgren, *Parables of Jesus*, 81  
• Jeremias, *Parables of Jesus*, 131  
• Levine, *Short Stories by Jesus*, 69  
• Lischer, *Reading the Parables*, 99  
• Ramsey, “Plots,” 36  
• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 160  
• Tolbert, *Perspectives on the Parables* |
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<tr>
<td>77</td>
<td>slanders/imputes bad behavior to brother without known foundation</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td>• Bailey, <em>Poet and Peasant</em>, 199</td>
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<td>• Blomberg, <em>Interpreting the Parables</em>, 209</td>
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<td>• Ramsey, “Plots,” 36-37</td>
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<td>• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family” 161</td>
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<td>• Schottroff, <em>Parables of Jesus</em>, 144</td>
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<tr>
<td>78</td>
<td>misunderstands why the calf was slaughtered</td>
<td>30</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>• Rohrbaugh, “Dysfunctional Family,” 161</td>
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*Parables*, 104
• Trench, *Parables of our Lord*, 319
Table 4: Divergent Evaluative Construals of Segments of The Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32)

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<th>#</th>
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<td>44-45</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>22-24</td>
<td>8-9, 11-16</td>
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<td>18-19, 21-22</td>
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CHAPTER 4

THE TREASURED SON (LUKE 15:11-32) AS AN AESTHETIC COUNTERPART

In Chapter 3, I argued that PS lends itself to diverse, story-defining inferences, and that this is grounds for inferring something of the author’s intention. PS is not intended to communicate a certain, definite content or do a certain, definite thing—whether allegorically, metaphorically, or rhetorically. Rather, I propose that it is best to infer that PS is intended for reception in an aesthetic mode.

In *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension*, Via attempted to work out the “full implications” of recognizing parables as “genuine works of art, real aesthetic objects.” He turned to “aesthetic and (non-biblical) literary-critical thought” and proceeded by developing a method and interpreting select parables through the method—indeed, *Parables* is divided into two parts: “Methodological” and “Interpretive.”¹ In adopting a literary-critical methodology, Via was at the forefront of the shift to literary concern about to take place throughout biblical studies in subsequent decades. Today, “aesthetic” language is relatively rare, but literary-critical, especially narrative-critical terminology is altogether commonplace in parable studies and biblical studies generally. To my mind, however, Via fell short of working out the “full implications,” not only because his methodology was inadequate (as discussed above, Ch. 1:2.1.2), but because the full implications are simply not available within a develop-method-and-interpret procedural framework. The impersonal analysis and interpretation of a text in literary-critical terms, no matter how sophisticated, is not the same thing as aesthetic reception. What is required, I contend, is the development of a conception of

¹ Via, *Parables*, ix-x.
aesthetic reception and a consideration of the alleged “aesthetic objects” in the context of this sort of reception. I do not intend—and I do not believe it would be possible—to create a “method of aesthetic reception”; rather, I am proposing that critical awareness of aesthetic reception is vital for the study of texts when it may be reasonably inferred that they are intended for aesthetic reception. PS’s allowance for diverse, story-defining inferences does not compel, but certainly supports the inference that the author of PS

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2 Employing C. S. Lewis’s distinction between “literary” and “unliterary” reading (An Experiment in Criticism [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961]), Stephen I. Wright argues similarly—though more broadly—about the limits of hermeneutics and the need to recognize the place of “literary” reading in the reception of biblical texts (“An Experiment in Biblical Criticism: Aesthetic Encounter in Reading and Preaching Scripture” in Renewing Biblical Interpretation, ed. Craig Bartholomew, Colin Greene, and Karl Möller, Scripture and Hermeneutics Series 1 [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000], 243):

As I shall show, there is a difference between interpreting a text (carrying the inevitable suggestion of translating it into something else) and dwelling in a text, encountering the reality which it mediates. It is that encounter with which I am concerned. However, this chapter asserts its place in a volume about the renewal of hermeneutics by way of reminding the discipline of hermeneutics that, necessary as it is to a Christian understanding and proclaiming of biblical truth, it should recognize its own limits…. “Hermeneutics”—like dogmatics in Barth’s thinking—serves the reading and preaching of Scripture, but does not fully describe or circumscribe these activities, whose goal is not to interpret a text but to meet and praise God. To reach that goal we need not only the discipline of hermeneutics but also, I suggest, the kind of ‘literary reading’ which Lewis articulates.

Helmut Gabel similarly draws attention to that which lies beyond the reach of the interpretive methodologies of modern biblical studies. Gabel proposes Ignatian contemplative practices as a fitting complement (“Ignatian Contemplation and Modern Biblical Studies,” The Way 44 [2005]: 48-49):

Analytical academic exegesis in its various forms needs to be supplemented by more personal, experiential methods, more prayerful and faith-shaped approaches—otherwise it will remain a head-trip, something distanced and detached. Conversely, Ignatian contemplation needs to keep an eye on exegetical knowledge—otherwise it will unconsciously perpetuate and solidify conventional patterns of thought and receptivity that have come to be associated with particular biblical passages.
intends the text to be received in an aesthetic mode—that PS is what I shall call an
aesthetic counterpart.³

A seemingly oblique approach is in order. First, using EDMR, I systematically
describe an aesthetic reading mode (Section 1). Only after this work is complete does it
become possible to consider PS properly as an aesthetic counterpart (Section 2). I
present four fictional vignettes to illustrate aspects of reading PS in an aesthetic mode
(Section 2.1); I attempt to articulate what purposes PS serves as an aesthetic counterpart
(Section 2.2); and, I suggest solutions to problems that might arise for modern readers
attempting to read PS in an aesthetic mode (Section 2.3).

As I set out here to reconceive PS, a renaming of the parable seems to be in order.
I propose The Treasured Son. “Treasured” refers to two events central to the plot: the
initial financial investiture of Younger (15:12)—the son is given money, “treasured,” if
the verb is stretched to a transitive meaning; and Father’s response to the reappearance of
Younger (15:20-24)—it is apparent that Younger is dear to Father, that Father “treasures”
him. Moreover, in any plausible construal of the text, one or both of these treasurings is
central to the drama between Elder and Father (15:25-32): Elder is concerned that
Younger lost the treasure; and/or Elder is concerned that Father treasures Younger
inappropriately; and/or Elder is concerned that Father does not treasure him

³ I adopt the term aesthetic counterpart in place of “art” and “aesthetic object” to
ensure that the role of reception activity remains apparent. The text is intended to be a
counterpart to a reader in an aesthetic transaction; to put this in a condensed form, the
text is an aesthetic counterpart. Though I have some misgivings about the term aesthetic
(its derogatory associations with frivolity, its conventional sense of having to do
exclusively with beauty), I know of no better alternative (though the term “literary” might
be equally appropriate). Furthermore, as the idea of an aesthetic reading mode (which I
describe below) is inspired by Rosenblatt’s notion of an “aesthetic stance” (Reader, 22-
47), the term “aesthetic” serves as a mark of my indebtedness to her.
appropriately; and/or Elder does not treasure his brother, or he treasures the lost inheritance more than his brother; and/or Elder expects the return of Younger to result in a redistribution of treasure from Elder to Younger. Furthermore, this title does not incline the text toward a positive or negative construal of any of the characters as do titles like “The Compassionate Father and His Two Lost Sons” (Snodgrass) and “A Dysfunctional Family and Its Neighbours” (Rohrbaugh). Whether Father treasures Younger in a positive, even godly way, or in an indulgent, inordinate, or otherwise problematic way is not presupposed. Thus I shall refer to the parable as The Treasured Son (henceforth, TS).

1. A Description of an Aesthetic Reading Mode in EDMR Terminology

EDMR describes the following five types of reading activity:

1. *acts of comprehension*, which are directed at the text and generative of text representations;

2. *acts of engagement*, which are directed at the developing envisionment and generate engagement experiences;

3. *acts of extratextual accrual*, which are directed at other phenomena (especially materials and people comprising the reading situation) and are generative/reformative of all types of envisionment material;

4. *acts of management*, which refers to a superordinate class of reading activity responsible for governing acts of comprehension, engagement, and extratextual accrual—the primary envisionment-formative activities; and

5. *usage* of the envisionment, which has formative repercussions upon the envisionment.

*Reading mode* pertains to acts of management: a reading mode is a program of management. In the discussion of acts of management above (Ch. 2:3.4) I refer to several terms, e.g., stance, style, cognitive control system, that all indicate something similar to what I call *mode*. Management activity consists of three things: forming an intention; pursuing that intention by modulating the primary envisionment-formative activities in...
accordance with a set of envisionment standards; and monitoring progress. A specific reading mode, then, consists of a particular sort of intention; a particular set of envisionment standards; and (possibly) a particular manner of monitoring. Any reading mode could be described in this way; I aim to describe here an aesthetic reading mode.  

I am not proposing a new way of reading but defining as thoroughly as possible what I believe to be a manner in which people already read. Indeed, it seems plausible to me that people have read or otherwise received stories in this manner (or in a manner consistent with the broad strokes of what I will describe) since storytelling began. I am not so much arguing a case or applying a method; rather, I am attempting to describe, however approximately, certain kinds of reading phenomena with a technical terminology. I hope that readers are able to recognize instances of their own reading

5 In theory a reading mode could require a specific manner of monitoring activity, but I have not found this to be the case with aesthetic reading. All that is required is that the monitoring be competent. I will not describe monitoring activity at all below. I refer to it here for the sake of completeness. While my primary purpose in this section is to describe an aesthetic reading mode, secondarily, in doing so, I hope to exemplify how the constructs of EDMR may be employed for defining reading modes generally. The ability to define reading modes, especially to the degree of specificity EDMR allows, is valuable both for articulating reception-critical arguments in biblical studies and for working with readers in practical situations. The description of other reading modes might need to include a specification concerning monitoring activity.

6 So far as I am aware, no modern approach to biblical texts equates to aesthetic reading. Aesthetic reading bears some similarity to the process of internalization that performance critics describe. Philip Ruge-Jones, for example, writes (“Taking Luke’s Gospel to Heart: Creating a Community of Mercy and Compassion through Biblical Storytelling,” PRSt 42 [2015]: 85):

Then, the performer prepares by working through the text multiple times (reading it out loud, sensing the flow, visualizing how the events unfold, incorporating gestures that facilitate remembering the flow, learning to embody it faithfully). Usually the performer will try out different voices, dynamics, tensions, and pace to discover those which carry the text forward faithfully into performance. This process works best in short, daily practice sessions over an extended period of time. In his workshops, Dewey refers to this as "marinating" in the story.
experience in what I describe, and that the technical system ultimately illuminates the reading experience—rendering it more available to critical consideration.

1.1 The Intention in an Aesthetic Reading Mode

In EDMR, “intention” consists of two things: adopting a task and being motivated to perform it (Ch. 2:3.4.1). Regarding the task to be adopted in an aesthetic reading mode, I propose that the reader attempts to realize in herself an expression of the profundities she expects to find in the text. “To realize in herself” and “an expression of the profundities she expects to find in the text” are indeterminate, but they are not vacuous; together they produce a substantive but flexible definition. Flexibility is necessary because aesthetic reading is largely amorphous and open-ended. At the same time, the definition reflects what I take to be the most stable characteristics of aesthetic reading. First, “to realize in herself” signifies that the reader means to proceed predominantly by way of firsthand transaction with the text—by way of the coming together of herself and the text. Second, “to realize in herself” is broad enough to include the plurality of

Peter S. Perry directs readers to other similar descriptions of “internalization” (Insights from Performance Criticism, Insights [Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2016], 70-71).

Inasmuch as aesthetic reading is “personal,” it has some affinity with approaches adopted in personal voice criticism, e.g., The Personal Voice in Biblical Criticism, ed. Ingrid Rosa Kitzberger (London: Routledge, 1999).

7 On the importance of firsthand transaction in the reception of literature there is perhaps no greater advocate than Rosenblatt, whose transactional theory of reading is described above (Ch. 2:2; 3.4.2). She writes (Reader, 86):

In the aesthetic transaction, the text possesses an especial importance. In the efferent situation, a paraphrase or summary or restatement—in short, another text—may be as useful as the original text. Someone else can read the newspaper or a scientific text for you and paraphrase it quite acceptably. But no one can read a poem for you. Accepting an account of someone else’s reading or experience of a poem is analogous to seeking nourishment through having someone else eat your dinner for you and recite the menu. The summary of a biology text, the
activities the reader performs. The reader means to experience, to live through something and to become personally active in myriad ways, as Slatoff describes:

Reading even a relatively short and simple poem or story is first of all an action. As one begins to read it, the work is not an object, flat on the table, ready for examination, but rather a territory, sometimes a world, one is about to journey into and explore. As one reads one has the feeling one is moving into and through something and that there is movement within oneself—a succession of varied, complex, and rich mental and emotional states usually involving expectancy, tensions, and releases, sensations of anxiety, fear, and discovery, sadness, sudden excitements, spurts of hope, warmth, or affection, feelings of distance and closeness, and a multitude of motor sensatory responses to the movement, rhythm, and imagery of the work as well as a variety of activities and responses—recognition, comparison, classification, judgment, association, reflection—usually spoken of as intellectual. Very few experiences engage one’s consciousness in so many ways and give one such a sense that something is going on within oneself. Consider, for example, the immeasurable difference between what goes on in a consciousness while it is fully responding to, say, King Lear, Moby-Dick, or The Wasteland and the state of that consciousness on most other occasions. If Coleridge is right, the reading of a poem may bring the whole soul into activity.8

Finally, “the profundities she expects to find in the text” indicates that the reader means to attend to the text diligently, means to have experiences concerted with the most rephrasing of the technical language of a law, may serve but only the relationship between the reader and the actual text, his attending to and synthesizing his own responses to the particular words in their particular order, can produce the poem for him.

8 Slatoff, With Respect to Readers, 7. Rosenblatt likewise emphasizes the idea that aesthetic reception is a “living through” of an experience (Reader, 26-27):
Keats, in his sonnet “On sitting Down to Read King Lear Once Again,” writes … once again, the fierce dispute
Betwixt damnation and impassion’d clay,
Must I burn through.
The special mark of the literary work of art is indeed that it is “burned through,” lived through, by a reader.
She writes elsewhere (ibid. 32):
The evocation of a work of art is itself a form of experience in the real world, one that can be related to the other forms of experience. Sometimes what has been lived through is felt to be a version of the real, as in naturalistic fiction. Sometimes it is felt as an escape from it, an experiencing of alternative possibilities. What makes it art rather than say, history, is that a particular kind of relationship with a text has been lived through.
excellent qualities of the text—its design, its depiction of human affairs. The practicability of a text being read in an aesthetic mode and the scope of the undertaking are thus dependent upon the quality of the text, the “profundities” to be “realized.” The aesthetic reading of a substantially profound text will likely require the progressive development of the envisionment over successive transactions. Fellow readers, whole communities, guide the reader in her selection of texts. What Frank Kermode writes of himself as of other literary critics, rigorous in their attempts to develop interpretations accounting for textual details, is also true for aesthetic readers: “[W]e need some assurance that a book has sufficient value … to warrant the kind of attention we are proposing to give it…. More formally, this high valuation is achieved by including the text in a canon.”9 Kermode presents what I take to be two warnings. First, under diligent attention, perhaps “close reading”—that of literary critics, religious communities, or as I am proposing, aesthetic readers—a text may seem to have more value than it does: when a text is “studied intensely … it acquires mystery or secrecy.”10 Second, the formation of canons is an imperfect process, sometimes excluding works of greater merit, including those of less.11

Regarding the motive, I propose that aesthetic reading requires a mixture of three goals as well as a certain pervasive quality. First, the reader adopts the task because she

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10 Ibid., 144; passim.

expects that the activity will be enjoyable in itself. Robert Alter emphasizes the sheer enjoyability of literary reading throughout *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age*. Presenting the experience of reading Gen. 24:30-31 as an example, Alter writes:

The remarkable speed of characterization here is in part dictated by the extraordinary economy of means employed by the biblical narrative, but the kind of communication that takes place is also characteristically literary. All we know about Laban when he appears on the scene is his name (it means “white one,” which later will become thematically significant), his family relationship, and, most strikingly, his eye for the glittering jewels with which his sister appears suddenly bedecked. The eyeing of the jewels is tucked into an introductory subordinate clause, and what it means as a narrative datum is left in delicate suspension. Perhaps, because the seeing is coupled syntactically with the hearing of Rebekah’s report, it merely indicates a recognition that the stranger has good connections and honorable intentions, and therefore may be welcomed into the household. But the strategic reticence with which information is conveyed opens the strong suspicion that Laban’s Oriental professions of hospitality are mere hypocrisy and triggered by the profit motive…. What I would stress about the literary character of this communication is not only the avoidance of semantic disclosure, the encouraging of a balancing between different possible construals, but also what might be called the high fun of the act of communication. As receivers of this potentially ambiguous message, we are meant, I think, to take pleasure in the very economy with which it is conveyed (in other kinds of texts, profusion or ornamentation rather than economy might be the source of pleasure), in the syntactic subordination of the information, which has the teasing effect of disguising it but disguising it transparently. In this way we are invited to join actively in a game for which the rules are indicated by the text, imaginatively beginning to build a picture of Laban’s character that will have to be augmented or revised if and when we are given more narrative data about him. This open-ended process of pleasurable discovery is literary reading par excellence.\(^\text{12}\)

Second, the reader expects that the activity will be somehow life-enhancing. The reader may not have a particularly determinate view of how the activity is to be life-enhancing, but she expects it to be so in some way. Rosenblatt suggests the life-enhancing quality of literary experience:

\(^{12}\) Alter, *The Pleasures of Reading in an Ideological Age* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 30-31. This example is particularly apt as there is a similar “avoidance of semantic disclosure” in TS. Rosenblatt similarly argues that aesthetic reading is pleasurable in itself (*Reader*, 69).
When there is active participation in literature—the reader living through, reflecting on, and criticizing his own responses to the text—there will be many kinds of benefits. We can call this growth in ability to share discriminatingly in the possibilities of language as it is used in literature. But this means also the development of the imagination: the ability to escape from the limitations of time and place and environment, the capacity to envisage alternatives in ways of life and in moral and social choices, the sensitivity to thought and feeling and needs of other personalities…. This is indeed the paradox of the intensely personal nature of the reading of a literary work: it is a kind of experience valuable in and for itself, and yet—or perhaps, therefore—it can also have a liberating and fortifying effect in the ongoing life of the reader.\textsuperscript{13}

Third, the reader expects the activity will facilitate relationships with others. The reader aims to become a party to the text and thereby to participate in the community of readers and to come into contact with the author.

In addition to these three goals, it seems to me that aesthetic reading will flounder unless the reader conducts herself \textit{in earnest}: the reader must genuinely esteem both the text and her own activity as an aesthetic reader.\textsuperscript{14}

I thus propose: \textit{in an aesthetic reading mode, the reader earnestly intends to realize in herself expressions of the profundities she expects to find in the text, as this is to be enjoyable, life-enhancing, and conducive to her participation in a community.}

\textsuperscript{13} Rosenblatt, \textit{Literature as Exploration}, 276-77. Throughout much of \textit{Literature as Exploration} (173-262), Rosenblatt discusses the potential for literary experience to engender personal growth and to equip people for life in a democratic society. Alter likewise observes, “Literary language is an intricate, inventively designed vehicle for setting the mind in restless pleasing motion, which in the best of cases may give us a kind of experiential knowledge relevant to our lives outside of reading” (\textit{Pleasures of Reading}, 22). Tzvetan Todorov claims, “Literature allows us to better understand the human condition and transforms each of its readers inwardly” (“What is Literature for?” \textit{New Literary History} 38 [2007]: 30).

\textsuperscript{14} As Rosenblatt puts it, aesthetic readers ought to “honor” their transactions with texts (\textit{Reader}, 140, 143).
1.2 The Envisionment Standards of an Aesthetic Reading Mode

In order to enact her intention, the reader adopts a set of envisionment standards (Ch. 2:3.4.2). It is according to her envisionment standards that she will modulate her primary reading acts (comprehension, engagement, and extratextual accrual)—that she variously allocates her effort and attention to the diverse projects that together comprise “reading.” The adoption of envisionment standards refers to the (likely nonconscious) reader activity wherein intention is quantified, translated into a set of benchmarks, made to be operational in connection with the primary reading acts.\(^\text{15}\) The question to be addressed in this section is: What are the envisionment standards that best operationalize the intention defined above? To answer this, first I describe the array of envisionment dimensions that will be subject to standards in an aesthetic reading mode (1.2.1); then I describe the standards to be adopted for the regulation of these dimensions (1.2.2).

1.2.1 The Envisionment Dimensions Subject to Standards in an Aesthetic Reading Mode

When a reader adopts envisionment standards she also implicitly adopts a set of envisionment dimensions, those dimensions subject to the standards. As the intent characteristic of the aesthetic reading mode is complex, a rather sweeping array of standards is required, and these standards implicate a broad range of envisionment dimensions.

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\(^{15}\) Adoption of standards is one way to refer to reader activity implied by the reader’s ability to be satisfied or dissatisfied with her developing envisionment—and (dis)satisfied in specific ways. Whether or not this (dis)satisfaction is recognized explicitly by the reader, it is evident in her behavior, e.g., when she moves on (because she has developed her envisionment satisfactorily), when she rereads (because she has not), when she pursues extratextual information about the author (because there seems to be a lack in her current envisionment).
dimensions.\textsuperscript{16} Table 5, appended to this chapter, presents these dimensions in an organized way. Across the top row are listed the three text-referential categories of envisionment material: \textit{storyworld}, \textit{composition}, and \textit{artifact}. Down the left-hand column, to the break, are listed six reader-referential categories of envisionment material: \textit{representations}, \textit{sensations}, \textit{emotions}, \textit{judgments}, \textit{involvements}, and \textit{entanglements}. From these, eighteen boxes result. Each one (minus the two that are blacked out) accounts for a specific kind of envisionment material. Envisionments may include \textit{storyworld representations}, \textit{composition representations}, \textit{artifact representations}, \textit{storyworld sensations}, \textit{composition sensations}, and so on; in Table 5, a total of sixteen kinds of envisionment constituents are recognized. For each constituent, in each box, there are listed applicable standard dimensions. So, for example, a reader may set a \textit{standard of vividness} pertaining to \textit{storyworld sensations}. \textit{Vividness} names a dimension applicable to \textit{storyworld sensations} relevant to the \textit{aesthetic reading mode}. In order to ensure that the storyworld sensations she experiences in transaction with the text measure up to her intent, the reader adopts a certain \textit{standard of vividness}. In addition to the dimensions related to each of the sixteen envisionment constituents, there is one additional dimension, \textit{configuration}, that pertains to the entire envisionment (this is in Table 5, after the break).

Altogether, there are 50 dimensions, each one bulleted in Table 5. The following fifteen-item list summarizes the dimensions:

\begin{itemize}
  \item Attempts to map out abstract space (as in the current task of delineating envisionment dimensions in a manner apposite to the aesthetic reading mode) are the more successful, to my mind, the more parsimonious they are. In what follows I have aimed for economy, but in the end, I have likely erred on the side of too much, of overspecification and occasional redundancy. It seems preferable to me to entertain some excesses than risk reinforcing simplistic conceptions of reading.
\end{itemize}
1. *constituent congruence*: the degree to which the content of any one constituent is in agreement with the content of the others; each of the sixteen types of envisionment constituents is subject to a standard pertaining to its congruence;

2. *representation coherence*: the degree to which the stuff comprising the representation is integrated into a self-consistent, organized whole; each of the three types of representations (storyworld, composition, and artifact) is subject to a standard pertaining to its coherence;

3. *representation adequacy (to text/best available knowledge)*: the degree to which the representation accounts for textual phenomena/available knowledge; both storyworld and composition representations are subject to a standard pertaining to their adequacy to the text; artifact representations are subject to a standard pertaining to their adequacy to the best available knowledge;

4. *sensation vividness*: the degree to which sensations are lifelike in quality; each of the three types of sensations (storyworld, composition, and artifact) is subject to a standard pertaining to its vividness;

5. *sensation nuance*: the degree to which sensations are complex and well specified; each of the three types of sensations (storyworld, composition, and artifact) is subject to a standard pertaining to its nuance;

6. *emotion vividness*: the degree to which emotions are lifelike in quality; each of the three types of emotions (storyworld, composition, and artifact) is subject to a standard pertaining to its vividness;

7. *emotion nuance*: the degree to which emotions are complex, well specified; both storyworld and artifact emotions are subject to a standard pertaining to their nuance;

8. *judgment soundness*: the degree to which judgments consist of the just application of appropriate standards; each of the three types of judgments (storyworld, composition, and artifact) is subject to a standard pertaining to its soundness;

9. *judgment nuance*: the degree to which the matter subject to evaluation is complex and detailed; each of the three types of judgments (storyworld, composition, and artifact) is subject to a standard pertaining to its nuance;

10. *involvement immediacy*: the degree to which the reader experiences herself to be present in involvements; both storyworld and artifact involvements are subject to a standard pertaining to their immediacy;

11. *involvement novelty*: the degree to which the involvement requires that the reader relate to/partake in new perspectives/situations; both storyworld and artifact involvements are subject to a standard pertaining to their novelty;
12. *involvement nuance*: the degree to which involvements are complex and well specified; both storyworld and artifact involvements are subject to a standard pertaining to their nuance;

13. *entanglement significance*: the degree to which the entanglement implicates the reader’s core preoccupations and fundamental personal constructs; both storyworld and artifact entanglements are subject to a standard pertaining to their significance;

14. *entanglement nuance*: the degree to which entanglements are detailed and well specified; both storyworld and artifact entanglements are subject to a standard pertaining to their nuance;

15. *envisionment configuration*: the structure and consistency of the envisionment in terms of the centrality and proportions of storyworld, composition, and artifact material.

In the aesthetic reading mode, each of the 50 dimensions is subject to an envisionment standard.

1.2.2 The Set of Envisionment Standards in an Aesthetic Reading Mode

In the aesthetic reading mode, the reader adopts 50 envisionment standards, one for each of the dimensions delineated above. Each standard expresses a commitment: the reader requires herself to allocate effort and attention in certain ways over the course of her transactions with the text. I describe the standards in three steps. The standard pertaining to envisionment configuration is unique; I consider it on its own (1.2.2.1). The other 49 standards are all gradient standards. I propose that the reader progressively maximizes these standards (1.2.2.2), and then I review the commitments that these standards represent (1.2.2.3).

1.2.2.1 The Standard Pertaining to Envisionment Configuration

A standard pertaining to the configuration of the envisionment specifies the *proportions* of different types of envisionment material that are to comprise the
envisionment and the *centrality/marginality* of the different types of material. In the aesthetic mode, the reader seeks to realize in herself expressions of the profundities of the text; she thus means to commit the majority of her resources to developing the composition and storyworld constituents of her envisionment. In other words, the reader adopts a configuration standard of storyworld and composition predominance; the reader aims to develop an envisionment centered around storyworld and composition constituents rather than artifact constituents.\(^{17}\)

1.2.2.2 The Progressive Maximization of the 49 Gradient Envisionment Standards

The remaining 49 standards are gradient standards, each specifying the degree to which a given quality is to be realized. Each is set along a scale that runs from minimum to maximum. For example, a reader could adopt a *minimum storyworld sensation vividness standard* to the effect that even paltry storyworld sensations experienced in transaction with the text will seem satisfying—or at least not dissatisfying. She could adopt a more maximal standard, in which case she requires herself to imagine sensations incredibly lifelike and intense—visuals that are almost like seeing, tastes that are almost like tasting. The 49 standards are all gradient in this sense.

In an aesthetic reading mode, the reader adopts a program of the progressive maximization of the 49 gradient envisionment standards. In this program, each standard is a graduating standard. Each standard is set near the minimum at the beginning; then

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\(^{17}\) In this way, what I propose as an aesthetic reading mode is partially consistent with the New Criticism’s Intentional Fallacy. The formulation I propose enacts what I take to be the central intention behind the issuance of the Intentional Fallacy, namely safeguarding the unique role of the text itself as the counterpart to the reader in the context of aesthetic reception. Excesses, in the employment of this fallacy if not in the construction of it, are rejected. Indeed, I maintain that aesthetic reception is particularly appropriate when it may be reasonably inferred that the author intends the text to be received in this way.
whenever a standard is satisfied, it bumps up—graduates—by degree toward the maximum. Graduating standards are appropriate for two reasons. First, assuming a considerably profound aesthetic counterpart, the reader has a lot to do and it cannot all be done at once. A program of graduating standards makes the workload manageable. The reader builds little by little over successive transactions.

Second, the reader, because she seeks “to realize in herself,” needs an initial phase of transaction conducive to getting acquainted with the text. From this initial phase the reader progresses by degree from laxity to rigor. There is movement from a disposition of allowing things to happen to one of greater command of the situation and more productive developments. At the start, with the standards near minimum, the reader will likely be able to rely upon her automatic processes. In her primary exposure to the text, the reader is establishing a connection. The relaxed standards provide the latitude necessary for the reader to be spontaneous, to trust her powers, and not to be overwhelmed. The reader allows herself to experience the text as relevant to her—whether these relevancies ultimately prove to be substantive or not. After this early phase, the reader’s standards gradually progress toward the maximum. Automatic processes more often prove insufficient; deficits in the envisionment become more apparent. Effort is required. Attention must be focused. The primary reading acts must be more capably modulated to develop higher quality. The reader feels the need to re-comprehend, revise, and rework; to expand, consolidate and reconsolidate; to imagine anew with more feeling and precision; to remake and rearrange again and again the stuff of her envisionment in order better to realize the text and to participate more completely.

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18 Rosenblatt sometimes employs “rudimentary literary response” to refer to what the reader does in her early transactions with the text (Reader, 7).
in the experiences it makes available. The developing envisionment reflects the reader’s so many adventures with the text. As she progresses, the reader likely feels as if she is “getting deeper into the text.” The reader graduates her standards until further graduation seems impracticable, until it seems not to serve her intention.

1.2.2.3 The Envisionment Standards to be Adopted in an Aesthetic Reading Mode

In adopting a standard, the reader takes on a commitment, a commitment conducive to the fulfillment of her intention. The intention characteristic of the aesthetic reading mode may be operationalized through the reader’s adoption of the following standards:

1. *graduating constituent congruence standards*: the reader commits to developing more and more complete agreement among the various constituents of her envisionment so that each more completely informs and is informed by the others;

2. *graduating representation coherence standards*: the reader commits to (re)forming her storyworld, composition, and artifact representations by way of more and more substantive and diverse programs of integration;

3. *graduating representation adequacy standards*: the reader commits to (re)forming her storyworld and composition representations to account for text phenomena more and more exhaustively; the reader commits to (re)forming her artifact representation to account for the best available knowledge more and more exhaustively;\(^{19}\)

4. *graduating sensation vividness standards*: the reader commits to sensatory exploration of the storyworld, composition, and artifact-world of the text—specifically, to more and more potent imaginings;

5. *graduating sensation nuance standards*: the reader commits to sensatory exploration of the storyworld, composition, and artifact-world of the text—specifically, to more and more complex and detailed imaginings;

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\(^{19}\) As each constituent is held to a standard of congruence, ultimately all constituents are informed by the representations and thus informed by the text as well as by the best available artifact knowledge (in so much as these are adequately represented).
6. **graduating emotion vividness standards**: the reader commits to emotional exploration of the storyworld, composition, and artifact-world of the text—specifically, to more and more potent emotional experience;

7. **graduating emotion nuance standards**: the reader commits to emotional exploration of the storyworld and artifact-world of the text—specifically, to more and more complex and detailed emotional experience;

8. **graduating judgment soundness standards**: the reader commits to (re)evaluating storyworld, composition, and artifact matters through the more and more thoughtful application of more and more appropriate standards;

9. **graduating judgment nuance standards**: the reader commits to (re)evaluating more and more complex and detailed storyworld, composition, and artifact matters;

10. **graduating involvement immediacy standards**: the reader commits to situational and perspectival exploration of the storyworld and artifact-world of the text—specifically, to imaginatively experiencing as more and more present to oneself situations and perspectives;

11. **graduating involvement novelty standards**: the reader commits to situational and perspectival exploration of the storyworld and artifact-world of the text—specifically, to imaginatively inhabiting new/foreign situations and new/foreign perspectives;

12. **graduating involvement nuance standards**: the reader commits to situational and perspectival exploration of the storyworld and artifact-world of the text—specifically, to imaginatively inhabiting more and more complex and detailed situations and perspectives;

13. **graduating entanglement significance standards**: the reader commits to exploration of the personal ramifications of the storyworld and artifact-world of the text—specifically, to discovering and investigating ramifications of greater and greater consequence to the self;

14. **graduating entanglement nuance standards**: the reader commits to exploration of the personal ramifications of the storyworld and artifact-world of the text—specifically, to discovering more complex ramifications and to investigating them in greater detail;

15. **a storyworld- and composition-centric envisionment configuration standard**: the reader commits to the prioritization of storyworld and composition constituent development over artifact constituent development and to the maintenance of the predominance of storyworld and composition constituents in the envisionment.
The reader who adopts this set of standards in earnest will modulate her acts of comprehension, engagement, and extratextual accrual across successive transactions so as to realize in herself expressions of the profundities of the text. In other words, she will read in an aesthetic mode.

2. TS as an Aesthetic Counterpart

TS, I contend, is an *aesthetic counterpart*, which is to say, it is meant to be received in an aesthetic mode. I am not claiming simply that one might read TS in an aesthetic mode and find the experience rewarding—although I believe this to be the case. Rather, I am proposing the more substantial claim that TS was, indeed, *intended* to be read in an aesthetic mode. I presented my grounds for this claim in Chapter 3: the allowance for a plurality of diverse, story-defining inferences is evidence rendering it at least reasonable to infer that the author has an aesthetic intent (rather than a straightforward didactic, rhetorical, or mind-shocking one as previous parable studies have maintained). In this section, I am operating under the assumption that the inference of aesthetic intent is correct—speculative though this may be. Thus the goal of this section is not to provide further argumentation concerning the author’s intent, but rather to elaborate more entirely a vision of TS as an aesthetic counterpart and to begin to explore the ramifications of recognizing TS as such.

To begin with, I offer four fictional vignettes to illustrate reading TS in an aesthetic mode (2.1). Then I attempt to define the purposes of TS as an aesthetic counterpart (2.2). Finally, I suggest solutions to problems likely to arise for modern readers attempting to read TS in an aesthetic mode (2.3).
2.1 Four Vignettes

Aesthetic transactions are unique and private events. They are experienced in the person of the reader as she develops her envisionment of the text. Even if many people are gathered, listening to a reading or witnessing a performance of a rendition of a text, each individual will still be transacting in ways essentially private, as each will be developing an envisionment within her own person. It is not possible to present an aesthetic transaction itself, to record the event of reading TS in an aesthetic mode. All wishing to “realize in themselves expressions of the profundities of TS” have no recourse other than to encounter TS firsthand. Nevertheless, it is possible to suggest what aesthetic transaction is like. That is the primary purpose of the following four fictional vignettes.\(^{20}\) Secondarily, I hope that these vignettes may serve as extratextual prompts conducive to developments in the envisionment of anyone pursuing aesthetic transaction with TS.

2.1.1 Rudimentary Responses

In an introductory college course, students are asked to submit a brief, unvarnished reaction to reading Luke 15:11-32 (the professor uses these responses to fine-tune her approach). The following are among the responses:

1. Everyone knows this one: God is ready to forgive you so come home.
   – Mary

2. The whole thing bugs me. The father is God, right? So why does the father give the kid the money in the first place? God would know that it would turn out badly. Doesn’t Jesus say somewhere something like, “Even an earthly father wouldn’t give his kid a snake”? So why does this father—representing God—give the son a snake?
   – Kenny

\(^{20}\) Though I have in some ways drawn from my own experience, the four vignettes are fictional.
3. The point is that Jesus forgives sinners and that people like the Pharisees, self-righteous people, can’t accept that so they choose of their own free will not to accept Jesus.
   – Paul

4. What I thought was interesting is that everyone always makes it out like the prodigal son feels guilty and repents, but it doesn’t actually say that anywhere. He’s hungry, he’s desperate, and he thinks of a way out. It’s not like he has some sort of grand spiritual awakening or like he’s tormented by his conscience.
   – Kate

5. I’ve heard this a ton of times, but this is the first time I’m reading it now that I’m away from home, like the prodigal son. It’s kind of like, “Don’t screw up!” I don’t think my parents would be quite so forgiving.
   – Alexa

6. This might not be the point, but this is how I read it: It’s saying, live your life, just don’t be out of control. If you work all the time and don’t try to enjoy life you end up like the older brother, bitter and hung up because you’ve never done anything. But the younger brother isn’t quite right either because he is out-of-control wild. So go out and live life but have common sense.
   – Jack

7. The prodigal son is a spoiled, entitled brat. I sort of sympathize with his brother, but even more I sympathize with the slaves: the prodigal got to have his big adventure because they work hard every day.
   – Melissa

8. Where is the prodigal’s mother?
   – Beth

2.1.2 Elder’s Problem

In one of her first transactions, Elizabeth construes Elder to be childish: she automatically infers that his anger (15:28) comes from jealousy; his refusing to enter (15:28) is pouting; and his reply to his father (15:29-30) is whining. Elizabeth understands Elder through a childish vs. mature construct—a mature person does not succumb to jealousy, does not pout but acts constructively, and does not whine but communicates clearly. In construing Elder to be childish, Elizabeth simultaneously judges him negatively. Her sensate impression of Elder is a composite of two things: a
generic vision of a person sulking (a silhouette with head turned to one side and looking
down, face frowning, arms crossed) and a memory of her five-year-old brother throwing
a tantrum. Elizabeth is satisfied that she comprehends Elder entirely—after all,
“childishness” is uncomplicated. And she has a ready solution to his problem: he needs to
grow up. Moreover, Elizabeth has an emotional sensitivity to childishness: it prompts in
her a combination of annoyance, boredom, and disdain. Consequently, she mostly
neglects the Elder material throughout her early transactions with the text.

Later she decides to make an effort to set aside her impression of Elder as she
reads the text again. She slows down as she gets to Elder coming from the fields,
becoming angry, and refusing to enter (15:25-28). Rather than dismiss Elder as
“childish,” she attempts to imagine his anger, to feel it for herself. At first she indulges in
some stereotypical gestures toward “anger,” but this feels off the mark, more like
mocking his anger than inhabiting it.

Instead of approaching Elder’s anger directly, she begins to search her memory
for times when she was angry. After rejecting several incidents as unhelpful, she comes
to dwell upon a particular episode she had almost forgotten about. Jane, her friend and
roommate at the time, was going through a sensitive matter and, rather than coming to
her for support, Jane turned to someone else. Elizabeth knew that this other person had
suffered something similar and was probably better equipped to help Jane. Nevertheless,
when Jane left Elizabeth to go meet the other person, Elizabeth felt stung. There was a
circle of intimacy over there and Elizabeth was by herself over here. It had hurt. She had
sat alone for an embarrassingly long time cycling through three kinds of thoughts: self-
pity, resentment, and self-accusation for feeling the pity and resentment. Looking back,
she could see that she had been jealous, but the jealousy was just the surface. Underneath there were several things: loneliness, a yearning to bond, a yearning to be a part of something important, a worry that she was inadequate, genuine affection for Jane, and a sense of powerlessness. She recalls that she had been cold and withdrawn toward Jane for some time after that. She feels a mixture of sympathy with her former self and loathing at her self-centeredness—after all, Jane was the one who was suffering. And she is touched with a bit of gratitude that her relationship with Jane did eventually develop into a deeper friendship.

Returning to TS, this memory gives Elizabeth a new way to enter Elder’s character. She works out what she takes to be a coherent version of Elder. She imagines Elder feeling exhausted from work, then disbelieving and perplexed hearing the music and dancing, and then defeated, bodily weakened when he learns the news. She imagines a cold anger, resentment compounded with loneliness and powerlessness—something akin to what she experienced. She imagines Elder’s refusal to enter as him silently walking away and surrendering himself to a stream of indignation: He has not been missed and will not be missed. He has always lived outside of his father’s affection. He’s not an intimate. He’s not loved. It doesn’t matter what he does. There is a bond between Younger and Father. There is no bond with him. There never will be. And look at what Younger has done!

She imagines that this emotional state warps everything Elder says to his father. When Elder speaks (15:29-30), he does not say exactly what he feels, what he wants; rather he indulges in his anger and attacks. He exaggerates his obedience and makes himself out to be a slave rather than a son. Elder speaks out of spite (he does not actually
want a goat). It is an accusation (You don’t express the slightest joy over me). It is a rejection of his father (I would prefer to share the company of my friends). When Elder calls his brother “your son,” he is not disowning his brother (not avoiding saying “my brother”); rather, he is expressing his sense of alienation from his father (That’s your son, not me. He’s the only one worthy of your care.). The cutting edge of Elder’s final attack is also directed at his father rather than his brother, and it is a perverse attempt at self-comfort (If I’m on the outside it’s because you are an absurd old fool—you don’t delight in me but in the one who devours your life with prostitutes).

Elizabeth stays with this for a time, trying to put herself into Elder’s character. As he walks away from the celebration, she feels the air cooling with the sun almost set. She hears distant sounds of music and dancing, occasional roars of cheer, bursts of laughter. She smells a barbeque-type smell. She experiences the sounds of merriment and wafts of cooking as an irritation, as Elder might have. She speaks Elder’s lines in her head and even out loud to try to hear the intonation. She visualizes Elder’s expressions and gestures, at times moving her own face and body to discover and participate in them.

As Elizabeth develops this version of Elder, several interconnected issues arise. She has worked to give credence to Elder’s anger and, generally, to his point of view. Thinking back to her memory of the Jane incident, Elizabeth understands why she had felt offended and behaved as she did, but she judges that she acted wrongly. But, she wonders, what about Elder? She decides quickly, In his speaking, he indulges in his anger and he attacks and tries to hurt—he does not try to communicate. He’s behaving wrongly. But evaluating Elder’s not entering the celebration, becoming angry, and taking offense proves more difficult. Elizabeth judges that she had been wrong to take offense at
Jane—Elizabeth had felt hurt, but that was not Jane’s fault. So Elizabeth wonders, Has Father given Elder reason for offense? And another question follows right upon:

Supposing Father is blameworthy in some way, shouldn’t Elder still celebrate his brother’s return, his brother’s being alive? And another concern follows this: Whatever his Father has done, shouldn’t Elder have an initial reaction of joy? And even if Elder is convinced to join the celebration, to do what is “necessary,” what about the absence of genuine joy in him? This notion overwhelms her. All at once, a view of Elder’s predicament takes form in her mind:

He is stuck, tragic, damned, so preoccupied with his own injury (real or perceived) that he is indifferent to his brother’s life and insensitive to the wonder that has taken place in his midst. What is worse, he does not and cannot recognize that he’s crippled, that his humanity is dulled, deadened. Clinging to his sense of injury, there’s nothing left of him for joy.

On the periphery of her awareness, some reflection of herself, unsettling, appears.

2.1.3 The Father’s Embrace

I was reading that in the 1200s, Hugh of Saint-Cher compared the Father’s reception of his son to a vulture swooping down and devouring a carcass:

What might sound rather strange to a modern reader is developed in a detailed parallel between the actions of the father and those of the vulture, “which first sees the cadaver from afar, then flies to it, attacks it, and finally incorporates it.” Thus, the father flies on the wings of misericordia et veritas, his falling on the neck of the returning son is like the nose-dive of the vulture, and his kiss is “as a vulture ingesting a cadaver”… [T]he father’s embrace and kiss are connected with the spiritual theme of divine incorporation.²¹

I find this image incredibly striking. On the one hand, it fits with my general impressions of the father’s running to and throwing himself upon the son; on the other hand, it is rather discordant… and disturbing. I doubt I will ever read Luke 15:20 without

seeing a vulture tearing into a carcass. Or for that matter, see a scavenging bird and not think of the father.

Sometime later, reading the parable again, I feel in my own fingers what the father felt: filth-stiff and slippery cloth, fabric running apart in my grip, bones and wasted body. Coarse, fouled hair, salty and wrongly sweet at the edge of my mouth, rot in my nose—whatever it is that remains upon all long-unwashed bodies. Surely this is what the father’s senses report as he embraces his son.

But he does not get the message. He’s gone. Knocked off his axis. Silly. The last thing he saw was his son appeared, and not dead, shredded apart by something out there, but standing right here. He is thankful, of course, but it is a black vision, too. Something he hates to see. He wishes he could take the suffering away. “It should have fallen to me,” he thinks.

The slaves notice the man’s decay. Without being told, they do their best to wash him before clothing him. They perfume him. And their master, not being altogether present—they manage to clean and perfume him, too.

The elder son does not witness any of this.

2.1.4 For Himself Alone

Thomas must have read right over the word “famine” countless times (15:14). He had incorporated it into his envisionment in relatively minor ways: it intensified the desperateness of the son’s plight; it added an ironic quality to the son’s fall—coming, as it did, just when he was at his most vulnerable, just when he had spent everything.

Thoughts had arisen in Thomas’s mind—Why a famine? What does this add to the story?
The son could have fallen into misery without a famine coming—but he always let these questions go.

Only later does Thomas find something significant. A few days after finishing Walter Kempowski’s *All for Nothing*, Thomas happens to read the parable again. It is at 15:17, when the son “comes to himself” and begins to plan his way out that a scene from Kempowski’s novel arises in Thomas’s mind. *All For Nothing* is set near the end of World War II and centers around the Globigs, a German family living near the eastern front. At the end, the Russians are advancing and a great many German civilians have retreated to a shoreline. In the final chapter, Kempowski writes:

> A rampart of silent humanity stood by the harbour, waiting for a miracle: for another boat to come and take them out to the very last ship lying at anchor in the roadstead: a grey silhouette as if cut from grey cardboard. Everyone was hoping for that miracle to happen for himself alone, and they were all surging down to the water to make the miracle come true for themselves.\(^{22}\)

*Everyone was hoping for that miracle to happen for himself alone* presents itself in Thomas’s mind. A realization slowly comes about. “Famine” compels Thomas’s attention, like a quiet noise growing louder: a famine, a famine, a *severe* famine in that country. Thomas thinks:

> Had it been a trick all along—the drama of the young son and this little detail—a severe famine struck that country—folded, neatly and unremarkably, into the account, the account of his tragedy. A famine: mass hunger, major disruption, multitudes in as bad or worse a situation than the son. He comes to *himself*, he plans escape for himself. *Everyone was hoping for that miracle to happen for himself alone*. And the thing of it is, he doesn’t even need a miracle, not really. He has a place to go, a way out. A connection. He’s able to escape. He’s probably one of the lucky few.

Now taking the context of a famine quite seriously, Thomas thinks on:

What about the father? Everything beautiful about his joyous, compassionate reception of his son could turn, in equal measure, to ugliness, depravity. If there is a solitary figure down the road and the father recognizes his son, is moved, and runs to him, that is one thing. But if the road is full of refugees from the famine-struck country and the father looks upon them hardheartedly only to spot his son, *his son alone*, far off—that is something else. “This son of mine was lost and is found, was dead and lives.”

As for the older son, his self-centeredness becomes absurd—he is frivolous, ridiculous: starving refugees wandering down the street and he’s too angry to go in and eat, he’s complaining about never getting a goat to feast on, he’s apparently worrying that some chip is about to be taken out of his wealth. It’s a privileged and thoroughly insular family: each son concerned only for himself, a father indifferent except to the suffering of his son alone.23

Thomas thinks further: *What happens if I look at the whole parable in negative relief, if I swap out the photograph for the film or take the foreground out of focus and unblur the background?* Several observations stream through his mind and he is not sure how or if they come together into anything coherent:

1. the slaves are just there, reliably, when the father commands;
2. the slaves presumably obey the father’s orders to tend to the younger son, even putting sandals on his feet, a sign of their submission and his freedom;
3. the slave gives a reliable report to the elder son;
4. the younger son has a brief experience of destitution, of dependence upon an unconcerned master, and he immediately gets out of it. He abandons his job, apparently gets up and walks away. He is altogether unreliable;
5. the younger son envies the father’s hired servants that they have plenty of bread;
6. the younger son plans to become a hired servant—or this is the pretense at least;
7. the elder son speaks of “slaving” for his father;
8. there are no women except for prostitutes. The younger son has money to hire them. Their livelihood depends upon the sexual appetites of moneyed men. The

23 Thomas recognizes but suspends for now other possible renditions: that the father acts compassionately to the multitude of refugees or that the father comes to some sort of change of heart having found his son among the refugees.
elder son refers to them, but not in a sympathetic way—not even in a moralistic way. The prostitutes are a prop in his attack on his brother, the money-waster;

9. the whole community will feast because the father happens to see celebration to be necessary;

10. and there’s the famine, which presumably devastated the great many who have no rich father to fall back on.

With considerable uncertainty, Thomas thinks, *There is something happening here with a contrast between privilege and precariousness. Slaves, hired workers, prostitutes, women—these were among the first-century audiences.*

2.2 The Purpose of TS

I proposed above (Ch. 4:1.1) that the task of aesthetic reading is to realize in oneself expressions of the profundities of the text, and that the reader is motivated to perform this task by a mixture of three expectations: that it will be enjoyable, life-enhancing, and conducive to participation in a community. The purpose of TS, in so much as its author intends it to be an aesthetic counterpart, is to fulfill these expectations, to possess the profundities necessary to incline instances of competent aesthetic reading toward being enjoyable, life-enhancing, and socially constructive for the reader. Reading TS in an aesthetic mode is, indeed, enjoyable, but I do not think enjoyability could be the author’s primary purpose. Rather, TS is intended to be life- and community-enhancing; its primary purpose is to occasion the development of the reader’s disposition toward TS-like phenomena and to serve as a locus of community.

Regarding the first purpose, by “disposition” I mean the orientation of the whole person toward the phenomena. In Chapter 2, I noted numerous reader aspects, e.g.,
knowledge, world standards, world sensitivities. 24 “Disposition” is to be understood in terms of the state of the whole collection of aspects—the knowledge, standards, sensitivities, etc., that the reader possesses.

“Development” means any change from relative deficiency toward maturity. The disposition is deficient when the aspects making up the disposition are not sufficient for processing the phenomena. Deficiency may therefore include such things as ignorance, inaccurate knowledge, false or ill-formed constructs, superficiality, insensitivity, oversensitivity, inexperience, inattentiveness, distorted self-view, inordinate preoccupations. Developing, the reader becomes better equipped, better attuned, more capable.

TS is to “occasion” this development. “Occasion” is open-ended. Every reader meets TS with different deficiencies and there is no set way for development to come about as the reader transacts with the text. So long as the reader is maximizing her standards, so long as she is applying herself more and more, so long as she is exercising her knowledge and capacities, she is susceptible to development. 25

24 All the reader aspects discussed are listed in the second column of Table 1: Reading Acts, Reader Aspects, Situation Aspects and Envisionment Constituents appended to Chapter 2.


Once a text has been internalized, it will often stay with a person for years, resurfacing at times beyond the control of the storyteller. When passing by a person in need, that pesky story of the Good Samaritan will suddenly rise to the surface. When the urge arises to strike out with violence at someone inflicting violence, the storyteller suddenly hears from within the echo of Jesus saying, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.” The sweep of the narrative asks again and again what it means to follow the anointed one who walks in the way of peace. While Bible stories contained in bound books must be sought out, pulled off the shelf, and read or re-read, an internalized story arises of its own accord.
Finally, at issue is not her disposition generally, toward all phenomena, but her disposition toward “TS-like phenomena.” It is not possible to circumscribe the same pool of phenomena by some other phrase; that would amount to replacing TS with (if not reducing it to) something else. In aesthetic transaction, the reader negotiates those many human things, major and minor, material to the parable: sonship, brotherhood, fatherhood, family, familiarity, intimacy, complacency, distance, absence, freedom, bondage, labor, dignity, pride, prostitution, manliness, command, possessing, requesting, wanting, journeying, spending, losing, failing, sinning, suffering, shoeing, clothing, slaughtering, searching, planning, returning, celebrating, caring, regaining, embracing, anger, joy, compassion, compliance, community, friendship, fairness, forgiveness, reconciliation, scandal, civil order, domestic order, wealth, reversal, dependence, disaster, duplicity, death, life, God. Even this list is wanting. It does not include everything and it casts what it does include conceptually. Moreover, it does nothing to account for the composition in which all the particulars of the text are situated in relationship. At any rate, I am proposing that through aesthetic transaction with TS the reader develops a more mature disposition toward the phenomena in life that resemble the phenomena encountered in the transaction; indeed, as an aesthetic counterpart, TS is intended to bring about just this sort of development.

Along the same lines, he writes (ibid., 85):
Carrying this story around in our flesh provides an ever-present voice within us that is not simply an echo of our own propaganda. The word urges our moral and spiritual character toward mercy and compassion. Embodying stories of compassion and mercy offers concrete content to these abstract virtues, we come to know what mercy looks like in action. We increase our repertoire of responses to life’s challenges by knowing the patterns of the response that Luke offers us.
In addition to this life-enhancing purpose, TS serves as a locus of community. As an aesthetic counterpart, TS contributes to the creation and sustainment of community. Relationships grow between reader and reader and between reader and author. Aesthetic reading requires a lot of the reader: she not only commits time and effort to the development of her envisionment, she also exposes to the work some of the more intimate dimensions of her person—her emotional machinery, her core preoccupations—and she does all this in earnest. Given this, it is likely that the developing envisionment will be for her a precious thing. Other readers, modern and historical, become for her companions—fellow readers-of-the-text, keepers-of-hard-won-envisionments. Casually or formally, readers connect with each other to share the stuff of their envisionments and to learn. Fellow readers help one another to recognize additional potentialities in the text, to comprehend and engage the text anew.26

The aesthetic reading of a text also serves to establish a relationship (or to enrich an existing one) between the reader and the author of the text. The development of author representations and engagements is not a priority in aesthetic reading but neither is this activity absent or irrelevant. In aesthetic reading, as I have defined it, the reader is concerned primarily with the development of storyworld and composition envisionment constituents and only secondarily with the development of artifact constituents—the latter is to serve rather than distract from the former.27 Every storyworld and composition

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26 Zimmermann, for example, claims that parables are inclined toward generating discussion (Puzzling the Parables, 98).

27 I discuss author representations and author engagements above (Ch. 2:3.1-2).
development makes available new inferences about the author. Moreover, since the text is, in one way or another, an expression of the author’s person, through aesthetic transaction the reader encounters the author. When the development of the envisionment has been truly momentous for the reader, she may even have the sense that the author has empowered her, entrusted something special to her. A bond is created, for the reader at least, between her and the author.

This is surely complicated in the case of TS. Jesus, Luke, the early Christian community, and (for believers) God, are all, in one way or another, authors of TS. In Chapter 3, I inferred from subtleties in the Greek text that TS is intended to be an aesthetic counterpart. “Luke” (the implied author associated with an unknown historical person), as the agent who rendered a stable, written, Greek text, is most evidently the one who has an aesthetic intent. It is ultimately unclear what of TS originated with the historical, flesh-and-blood Jesus, and it is unclear whether Jesus ever intended anything to be received as an aesthetic counterpart. Luke, at any rate, portrays Jesus as the author,  

28 For example, in the fourth vignette above, when Thomas discovers the theme “privilege and precariousness,” he might go on to infer something about the author—that the author is gravely concerned about social inequality. When Thomas wonders whether it has all been a “trick,” the implication is that the author has intentionally made the drama of Younger colorful and flashy in order to capture attention while at the same time introducing the famine into the story in an understated way. He might infer from this not only something of the author’s powers of narrative craft, but also something of the author’s understanding of human perception, of people’s propensities to be dazzled and fascinated by certain things and to be insensitive to others. If Thomas continues to pursue his line of development, he may come to envision the author as something akin to the subversive “pedagogue of the oppressed” that Herzog imagines Jesus to be (Parables as Subversive Speech, 9-29).

29 Donahue writes, “Through the language of Jesus we are in contact with his imagination as it brings to expression his self-understanding of his mission and his struggle with the mystery of his father’s will” (Gospel in Parable, 2). The reader may wonder about the personal experiences that have prompted and informed the author’s creation.
offers TS as something authored by Jesus, as an expression of Jesus’s person. Luke presents TS as a vehicle for knowing and communing with Jesus. Between Jesus and Luke are the efforts of early Christian communities to remember, understand, know Jesus—these efforts, too, surely contributed, directly or indirectly, to the creation/preservation of TS. In the absence of compelling evidence that there existed a substantial disharmony of purpose among Jesus, early Christians, and Luke (and perhaps God), there is little reason to attempt to tease apart a composite origin of TS. Over time, a competent aesthetic reader will develop an author representation accounting for this composite origin; this may include associating distinct renditions with specific authorial parties. In any case, through aesthetic reading the reader will likely experience the development of a relationship between herself and the author(s).

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30 I am sympathetic to Zimmermann’s construal of parables as “media for remembering Jesus” (Puzzling the Parables, 76-99). Adopting the memory paradigm articulated by Jens Schröter (Erinnerung an Jesu Worte: Studien zur Rezeption der Logienüberlieferung in Markus, Q und Thomas, WMANT 76 [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997]), James D. G. Dunn (Neither Jew nor Greek: A Contested Identity, Christianity in the Making [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003]), Chris Keith (Jesus’ Literacy: Scribal Culture and the Teacher from Galilee, LNTS 413 [New York: T&T Clark, 2011]) and others, Zimmermann insists, “In Jesus scholarship, we must stop trying to pit a historically reconstructed Jesus against the sources. Instead, the Jesus quest must be reformulated into the quest for a blueprint, based on the sources, of the remembered Jesus as the content of the social memory of primitive Christianity” (Puzzling the Parables, 77). He contends elsewhere, similarly (ibid., 87-88):

Evidently, a fundamental change of perspective must take place. The historical quest can have as its goal neither the reconstruction of origins or even facts of the words of Jesus nor the text or the event of the original communication. Although such original situations and data can be logically presupposed, it is not possible to gain access to them in a manner that is critically controllable by scholarship. The point of departure remains the canonical parable text. However, these texts do not have to be regarded as the works of one single author; they can be perceived as different written artifacts of a memory process. The Gospel narratives preserve memories of both people and events from Jesus’ field of influence as well as of the linguistic forms in which his influence was expressed or more precisely, first made possible.
In submitting TS as an aesthetic counterpart, the author challenges the audience to rise above carelessness, callousness, stupor, hardheartedness, superficiality, incompetence, etc., when it comes to TS-like phenomena. The author calls attention to these phenomena, insists that they are utterly significant. The author seeks to create a community practiced in TS, attuned, ready to recognize and navigate TS-like phenomena in life.

2.3 TS as an Aesthetic Counterpart in Practice

If it is acknowledged that TS is an aesthetic counterpart, then there follows a major ramification: there is a need to direct interest in TS toward the theorization and practice of facilitating real, competent aesthetic reading. If TS is an aesthetic counterpart, then what makes for a proper custodian of the parable is the ability to invite others to and assist others in competent acts of aesthetic reading. Aspiring aesthetic readers (as well as those guiding them) may, I hope, find the technical description of aesthetic reading above practically helpful. For one, it provides affirmation: with a clear idea of the aesthetic reading mode, would-be aesthetic readers have assurance that they are endeavoring into something more serious and worthwhile than idiosyncratic toying with the text. Aesthetic reading is a legitimate practice. In addition, the technical description may be useful to would-be readers for assessing which aspects of aesthetic reading they tend to excel at and which they tend to neglect. The vignettes, likewise, may be useful as they suggest what aesthetic reading looks like in the concrete, and the specific content of the vignettes may prompt new aesthetic transactions with TS and new envisionment developments.

Still, it seems to me that there are a number of difficulties that I have not discussed that are likely to arise for present-day aspiring aesthetic readers of TS. The
following lists potential problems and solutions—more or less troubleshooting directives for addressing breakdowns in the aesthetic reading of TS:

1. a preoccupation with “the point”: So long as the reader searches for “the point,” she is reading in a mode other than the aesthetic one. Since parables are so commonly thought of as things-to-be-interpreted—and in some instances Luke does not discourage this, e.g., 18:1—it is probably necessary for most readers deliberately to check inclinations to find or draw out the point and to think more about the sufficiency or insufficiency of their transactions and envisionments; 31

2. a preoccupation with an allegorical construal: So pervasive is the allegorical identification of Father with God, that many readers—like Mary (2.1.1)—long before they have given any serious consideration to the parable, already have an envisionment dominated by an allegorical construal of the text. If aesthetic reading is to progress, the reader must overcome the allegorical construal. By “overcome” I do not mean abandon; the reader does not need to excise the construal from her envisionment. Indeed, the allegorical construal is in some respects sufficient to the text as well as the reader’s intention. To “overcome” means that the reader lets the construal rest and attempts to develop others—she recognizes that an allegorical construal is not so perfect a reception of the text as to merit exclusivity;

3. a fixation on one rendition of the storyworld: Regarding TS, there is allowance for diverse, story-defining inferences (Chapter 3). No one rendition of the states and changes of affairs of the storyworld is a perfect realization of the text. In other words, TS has what might be called dramatic plasticity. 32 The reader will ultimately need to account for the dramatic plasticity of TS while at the same time maintaining the coherence of her envisionment. To do this, I suggest that the reader partition her envisionment, creating the mental space for multiple imperfect renditions; like so many mental stagings, each one will be uniquely sufficient (and insufficient) to the text;

31 Slatoff writes of concern for sufficiency of response in his litany of critique of the study of literature (“Against Detachment,” College English 32 [1970]: 257):
Insofar as we divorce the study of literature from the experience of reading and view literary works as objects to be analyzed rather than human expressions to be reacted to; insofar as we view them as providing order, pattern, and beauty, as opposed to challenge and disturbance; insofar as we favor form over content, objectivity over subjectivity, detachment over involvement, theoretical over real readers; insofar as we worry more about incorrect responses than insufficient ones; insofar as we emphasize the distinctions between literature and life rather than their interpenetrations, we reduce the power of literature and protect ourselves from it.

32 This term denotes something more circumscribed than “polyvalence.”
4. an assumption that Luke’s context (15:1-10) demands a specific construal of TS: Luke defines an occasion for Jesus’s delivery of TS (15:1-3) and Luke presents Jesus as delivering TS as the third parable in a series of three (15:4-10). It is possible for a reader to establish coherence among the set of three parables by developing a framework of repetition (loss, recovery, celebration) with amplification (from sheep to coin to son) and extension (TS continues, the celebration is disrupted). I suggest that it is more adequate to the text to establish coherence by a framework of repetition with complexification, problematization—TS militates against the simplifications of The Lost Sheep and The Lost Coin and broadens the scope of interest into human relationship. Likewise, Luke invites the reader to see TS as relevant to the situation into which Jesus speaks the parable, but Luke does not specify exactly how it is relevant.  

3. Conclusion

EDMR makes it possible to describe in detail an aesthetic mode of reception. In turn, this definition makes it possible to consider TS in the event of its aesthetic reception and thus brings to light an expansive vision of the parable, a vision of TS as a counterpart to a person, a person attempting to bring the text to expression in herself in myriad ways.

If it is established that TS is an aesthetic counterpart, then it is plausible that other parables are intended for aesthetic reception as well and so in need of a similarly expansive re-envisioning. It is to an investigation of this possibility and ultimately The Minas (Luke 19:12b-27) that I now turn.

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33 Wright aptly observes, “Modern commentators … have often been too ready to attribute a definite and reductive purpose to the Evangelists in this embedding of parables in the gospel story” (Voice of Jesus, 31-32).
Table 5: The Envisionment Dimensions Subject to Standards in an Aesthetic Reading Mode

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CHAPTER 5

THE DISGRACED SLAVE (LUKE 19:12b-27)
AS A RHETORICAL-AESTHETIC COUNTERPART

In Chapter 4, drawing on EDMR, I reconceived TS as an *aesthetic counterpart*. I concluded by raising the question as to whether other parables might benefit from similar re-envisioning. Table 6, appended to this chapter, presents the best candidates for aesthetic reception among the parables in Luke. It documents what I take to be the most relevant quantifiable aspects of these parables. The Minas appears to be the next best candidate, and indeed I find that consideration of its aesthetic reception reveals dimensions of the parable that have mostly gone undetected. In this chapter, then, I invite my reader to re-envision Luke 19:12b-27 as The Disgraced Slave (henceforth, DS), a rhetorical-aesthetic counterpart.

In what follows I proceed in a manner that reflects my own experience reading DS in an aesthetic mode. I begin by briefly reviewing the standard view of DS as well as the best alternative (Section 1). Then I consider the difficult conclusion of DS, that is, Luke 19:27 (Section 2). Next, I explore tenable construals of the individual characters: Slave 1 and Slave 2, the nobleman/king, the attendants, the citizens, and Slave 3 (Section 3).\(^1\) At this point—in so much as this chronology reflects the journey I took—I had a working construal of the parable that was not yet DS. I thought of the parable as The Order. I present this earlier construal as well as certain misgivings I had about it (Section 4). There eventually came about one last major shift in my envisionment. I relate what precipitated this shift and explain the resultant, rather non-intuitive construal, Luke

\(^1\) These are the designations I will use for these characters throughout.
19:12b-27 as The Disgraced Slave; additionally, I briefly attempt to describe DS as a rhetorical-aesthetic counterpart (Section 5).

1.1 The Standard View of DS and its Problems

DS is widely regarded as a Lukan allegorization of a more original parable better preserved in The Talents (Matt 25:14-30). Scott, for example, argues that DS is a “performance” derived from an “originating structure.” The originating structure (which Scott calls A Man Entrusts Property) equates to The Talents with certain Matthean redactions removed.² Luke has added throne claimant material (19:12, 14-15a, 27) to repurpose the parable as an allegory: “Luke apparently drew on the common repertoire of the throne claimant to recast a parable about a man going on a journey into an allegory for the enthronement and return of Jesus as king.”³ In keeping with the throne claimant motif, the three slaves of the original structure were transformed into ten (although the narrative reverts to three at the accounting), and the “reward” for Slave 1 and Slave 2 became authority over cities.⁴ Additionally, “Luke omits the description of the servants’ trading because his interest is in those challenging the legitimacy of Jesus’ kingship.”⁵ Prior to DS coming to rest in the fixed form of Luke 19:12b-27, other redactions supposedly came about haphazardly in response to audience reactions. Slave 3 becomes

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² Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 217-35. The Jesus Seminar adopts a similar view (Funk et al., *The Parables of Jesus: Red Letter Edition*, Jesus Seminar Series [Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1988], 54-55). So, too, Meier (*Marginal Jew*, 296-306). Indeed, Meier finds that “the parable of the slaves entrusted with money goes back in some form (or in multiple forms) to the historical Jesus” (306); it is one of only four parables for which Meier makes this determination.

³ Ibid., 223. Hultgren, comparing DS to The Talents, claims that the throne claimant material merely “adds color to the story” (*Parables of Jesus*, 285).

⁴ Scott, *Hear Then the Parable*, 221-22.

⁵ Ibid., 222.
more irresponsible: audiences were too often sympathizing with Slave 3 because burying money was reckoned a legitimate way to protect it; Luke (or the tradition he inherited) simply changed Slave 3’s conduct to wrapping the money in a cloth (supposedly a culturally inappropriate way to keep money) to ensure audience condemnation. The objection of the attendants, likewise, reflects audience reaction to the apparent injustice of the dispossession of Slave 3. In essence, Scott argues that DS resulted from the heavy-handed repurposing and incidental revising of a more original parable.

But the theory that early Christians formulated DS as an allegory is problematic. Francis D. Weinert writes:

[T]hose who consider the story an allegory do so because it seems to imitate an important pattern of beliefs reflecting post-Resurrection Christian understanding. As such they can find no plausible setting for this story in Jesus’ own teaching. But the apparent correspondence that they see between this story and Jesus’ death, resurrection—ascension, and parousia ignores two of the story’s most distinctive features: (a) the dispatching of a hostile embassy to follow the nobleman and to thwart his aim (19:14); and (b) the emphatically personal and brutal character of the ruler’s revenge (19:27). Both are key elements in the story: the citizens’ delegation defines the quality of their hatred by identifying the precise means that they use; the subsequent, specific punishment serves to underline both the gravity of their offense and the futility of their effort. Without a plausible explanation in Christian terms of allegorical meaning of these two graphic details, the case for this story as an early Christian allegorical creation collapses.

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6 Ibid., 228. Frank Zimmermann raises the possibility that the word for “ground” in an Aramaic original was confused for “napkin”; but this argument has won almost no support (The Aramaic Origin of the Four Gospels (New York: Ktav, 1979), 25.

7 Ibid., 232. Scott’s treatment of DS is representative of a widespread tendency to ignore the possibility that DS enjoys its own logic and integrity—that it is a cohesive narrative text. It should be noted, however, that there are a great many theories concerning the relationship between The Talents and DS. This is surveyed by Adelbert Denaux (“The Parable of the King-Judge [Lk 19,12-28] and its Relation to the Entry Story [Lk 19,29-44],” ZNW 93 [2002]: 36-43). Denaux, in fact, argues that “A predominant interest in reconstructing the original parable(s) has prevented most scholars from construing the Lukan parable as a consistent textual unit” (ibid., 45). Nevertheless, Denaux himself later argues that “The motif of the throne claimant (Lk 19,12.14-15a.27) is a secondary addition to the Q-parable” (ibid., 51).
Yet the most obvious allegorical application of these two points actually contradicts the early Christian understanding of Jesus. What sense could a Christian audience possibly make out of the image of a delegation sent after Jesus to prevent his heavenly enthronement? And if the nobleman in this story is simply an allegorical substitute for Jesus, how could a Christian audience reconcile the ruler’s vengeful treatment of his enemies with the teaching of Jesus on this matter? If early Christians created this story as an allegory, then they must also be responsible for introducing two important narrative features which are allegorically unintelligible from a Christian point of view.8

Moreover, it is far from certain, though it is often assumed, that the Lukan context is intended to prompt audiences to identify Jesus with the nobleman. Luke 19:11 is ambiguous.9 It says: ἀκουόντων δὲ αὐτῶν ταῦτα προσθῇς εἶπεν παραβολὴν διὰ τὸ ἑγγὺς εἶναι Ἰερουσαλήμ αὐτὸν καὶ δοκεῖν αὐτοὺς ὅτι παραχρῆμα μέλλει ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναφαίνεσθαι. The exact way or ways in which DS addresses the circumstance described is never disclosed. As a growing minority have been arguing, the nobleman is not a representation of Jesus.10


The disparity between Jesus and the nobleman had, of course, been observed previously. Jeremias, for example, recognizes the incongruity but does not entertain the possibility that Luke may not have intended an allegorical reception (Parables of Jesus, 59-60):

Hence we can see how Luke interpreted our parable: Jesus, perceiving the existence of an eager expectation of the Parousia, announces the delay of the
Additionally, the text is far more cohesive than Scott’s study suggests. Schottroff has identified a more promising direction: “[DS] tells a story that is coherent in itself, about the beginning of the reign of a vassal king, his management of the administration of his kingdom, and the establishment of his power.”¹¹ But Schottroff’s construal of the purpose of the parable is also wanting, in my opinion. She writes,

The parable thus clarifies for those standing around him why Jesus regards their messianic hopes as false. His political analysis is radical: The Roman *imperium* is brutally erected on money and power. You know how this *imperium* functions. Those who aspire too high will be killed (19:27). Jerusalem will be destroyed (19:41-44; 21:5-6, 20-24).¹²

Schottroff’s reading is coherent, if general. If the author(s) purposed as Schottroff describes, the details of the text are mostly extraneous and the story could have been more to the point.

1.2 An Alternative to the Standard Construal

Ernest van Eck, indebted to Schottroff (and even more so, to Rohrbaugh), envisions the cohesiveness of the text in a way that accounts better for the details, event, and for that reason instructs his disciples that the intervening period is to be a time of testing for them. Luke, then, would seem to have interpreted the nobleman who received a kingdom and demanded a reckoning from his servants on his return, as the Son of Man departing to heaven and returning to judgement. But Luke is certainly wrong. For it is hardly conceivable that Jesus would have compared himself, either with a man “who drew out where he had not paid in, and reaped where he had not sown” (Luke 19:21), that is, a rapacious man, heedlessly intent upon his own profit: or with a brutal oriental despot, gloating over the sight of his enemies slaughtered before his eyes (v. 27: ἔμπροσθέν μου).

If Jesus did compare himself to a brutal despot—namely, Archelaus—it must have been because, leaving Jericho, standing in the midst of Herodian palaces, Jesus was simply “using as a teaching tool his immediate surroundings, the ‘stuff’ of everyday life” (Brian Schultz, “Jesus as Archelaus in the Parable of the Pounds [Lk. 19:11-27],” *NovT* 49 [2007]: 116).

¹¹ Schottroff, *Parables of Jesus*, 187.

¹² Ibid.
especially those pertaining to Slave 3. Van Eck construes the parable according to a rather neat structure, worth presenting at length:

The structure (or strategy) of the parable is made up of five sets of “twos.” In an effort to enhance his power, privilege, and wealth, the nobleman does two things. He sets off with the hope of being proclaimed king (Luke 19:12b), and before he leaves he entrusts money to ten of his slaves to “do business” (πραγματεύσασθε) with one mina each (Luke 19:13). These two actions of the nobleman lead to two sets of reactions in the parable; one of adhering and one of protesting. Two slaves in the parable do business with their minas, and they receive compensation they expect from the nobleman (Luke 19:16, 18). Two characters in the parable protest against the actions of the nobleman. An embassy (as a character group) sets off to ask that the nobleman not be installed as king (Luke 19:14), and one slave protests against the instruction of the nobleman by not doing business with the mina he was entrusted with (Luke 19:20-21).

When the nobleman returns, two different sets of actions again take place. First, the two slaves who are able to show good profits are praised and awarded [sic] for their efforts…. Up to this point in the parable, there is a consistency in strategy: two actions, two protests, two compliances and two awards. In the last set of twos, when the nobleman reckons with his two protestors, the consistency in the parable is broken down. The enemies of the nobleman are judged and killed (Luke 19:27), but the third slave is not condemned (Luke 19:22-23). He is only labeled as a bad or evil slave (πονηρὲ δοῦλε). In terms of the structure of the parable thus far, the hearers of the parable would have expected that both the third slave and the embassy who protested would be judged and condemned. But then comes the inconsistency and surprise: the ruthless hard man … lets the third slave go only by labeling him as bad or evil. It is in this surprise in the parable that we have to look for its meaning.\footnote{Van Eck, *The Parables of Jesus the Galilean: Stories of a Social Prophet*, Matrix: The Bible in Mediterranean Context 9 (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2016), 292-93.}

According to van Eck, DS contrasts two ways of protesting exploitation. There is the “wrong way,” the course taken by the citizens: it leads to death. There is the “correct way,” the course taken by Slave 3.\footnote{Ibid., 295.} Slave 3 “does not want any part in the exploitation
of the peasantry,” so he simply protects the mina, wrapping it in a cloth.\footnote{Ibid., 297. Here especially van Eck is indebted to Rohrbaugh, “Text of Terror,” 37. Van Eck characterizes Slave 3’s noncompliance as a “weapon of the weak” and as part of a “hidden transcript” to which “peasants” were privy.} At the accounting, Slave 3 engages in a bit of calculated doublespeak. The nobleman would hear, “‘Master, I have so much respect for you (I am honoring you) that I did not want to take a chance with your money. I did what I thought was the honorable thing to do, that is, to protect what belongs to you.’” “Peasants” (in Jesus’s audience) would hear Slave 3 saying instead, “‘You are a thief, and I am not willing to be part of what you are doing!’”\footnote{Van Eck, Parables, 297-98.} DS is ultimately instruction: “This is the way to protest. ‘Honor’ those that exploit you, without taking part in their exploitation. To confront those that exploit directly, will not work.”\footnote{Ibid., 298.}

Van Eck’s proposal makes sense of most of the text and accounts well especially for both the punishment (or lack thereof) exacted upon Slave 3 and the details of Slave 3’s speech. But it does not account for 19:25 (which is dismissed as Lukan redaction) and accounts only superficially for the details pertaining to Slave 1, Slave 2, the attendants, and the king. Most troubling, to me at least, is the proposed teaching itself. I find it implausible that Jesus, who goes to his death, is instructing his hearers: \textit{In the face of injustice, keep your hands clean and keep yourself alive}. While Jesus may recommend prudence and social sagginess (van Eck associates DS with the saying “be as sly as a snake and as simple as a dove” [Matt 10:16b; Gos. Thom. 39:3]), the goal is not self-
protection. Nonetheless, assuming the integrity of (most of) Luke 19:12b-27, van Eck’s construal corresponds fairly well to both the text and the first-century Mediterranean cultural world. Something of an inversion of van Eck’s construal, I hope to show below (Section 5), is even better.


In the final verse of DS (19:27), the king orders his attendants to bring his enemies and kill them before him: πλὴν τοὺς ἐχθροὺς μου τούτους τοὺς μὴ θελήσαντάς με βασιλεύσαι ἐπ’ αὐτούς ἀγάγετε ὡδὲ καὶ κατασφάξατε αὐτοὺς ἔμπροσθέν μου. Concerns pertaining to 19:27 largely set the trajectory for my exploration of DS.

The content of 19:27 is acutely repugnant to modern sensibilities. It has come to be particularly troubling given the entrenched view that Luke intends the king to represent Jesus. J. Duncan M. Derrett expresses well a common distress:

From the behaviour of the king we are evidently to understand what will be the attitude of Christ at the Second Coming. All the teaching about righteous behaviour, and about rewards and punishments, has a bearing on our present life, and perhaps it is right to say that righteousness itself is salvation (heaven is not a perpetual dinner in another world). However that may be, a gospel of peace and reconciliation hardly does well to end a magnificent parable with such a grisly threat, and I was for long unhappy about it. Derrett eventually finds a reading that “makes the violence respectable”: he takes the victims to be evil spirits and inclinations rather than human people.

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18 Ibid.


20 Ibid., 137. Derrett writes (138): One commences by admitting God’s sovereignty. Only the evil spirits, agents of Satan, demur at that. Once such traitors have been detected, and envy and covetousness truly eliminated, the citizens of the kingdom can expect a propitious
Discomfort with this verse is palpable, though in a different way, in Snodgrass’s study. For Snodgrass, those to be slaughtered are human, those who rebel against God. However, Snodgrass avoids considering Luke 19:27 concretely. He raises the questions, “Does the harsh language in Luke 19:26-27 belong to the original parable? How should this harshness be handled?” But Snodgrass consistently refuses to refer to what is stated in Luke 19:27 in a specific, concrete way. Instead, he employs, euphemistically, some form of the word “harsh” (six times), or he speaks abstractly of “judgement” (five times), “violence” (once), or “punishment” (once). Snodgrass writes that there is “uncomfortable language” but that this is often the case with “prophetic language” (and he offers five examples, taken from Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel). When Snodgrass does eventually speak of “slaughter,” it is only to pivot discussion away from Luke 19:27: “Another fact must be mentioned. As Luke and his readers knew, rather than doing the slaughtering, Jesus is the one slaughtered.”

Blomberg treats Luke 19:27 more minimally and with even more remote language. Every allusion to the verse is abstract and/or euphemistic: “The fate of the citizens”; “punishment awaiting those in Israel”; “[God’s] complete dominion awaits future conquest”; “there are unjust dimensions to earthly kingships”; “final judgment is existence. It is highly to their advantage that the evil inclination should be suppressed, and that any element in them which resists the rule of God should, in their own interests, be cleared off the face of his earth.


22 Ibid., 540-41.

23 Ibid., 541. I can only wonder that recognition of this did not prompt Snodgrass to reconsider his construal of the parable.
harsh.” Blomberg dismisses “treatments of this passage that take it as a parody of God’s kingdom” (e.g., Vinson, “Minas Touch”), because they “fail altogether to understand the dynamic of parables, especially the ‘how much more’ logic that is so often present.” But Blomberg does not describe the way in which the “how much more” logic operates here. He concludes by belittling those who doubt the reading he endorses, especially Dowling and Schottroff: “Yes, final judgment is harsh and therefore unpopular, especially among those who do not want to submit to God’s rule or who cannot imagine that it could be anything but fully egalitarian.”

24 Blomberg, Interpreting the Parables, 278-80.

25 Ibid., 280.

26 In contrast, Blomberg is unambiguous when it comes to The Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8) (ibid., 369):

Jesus’ description of an unscrupulous authority figure does not prevent one from seeing the judge as in some sense standing for God. The logic is a fortiori (from the lesser to the greater); the only aspect of the judge’s behavior that makes him resemble God is his rewarding the woman’s persistent pleas. Snodgrass [Stories with Intent, 455] captures the logic concisely: “If even an unjust judge will vindicate a widow who keeps coming to him, how much more will God answer the cries for vindication from his people?”

In the case of The Unjust Judge, Blomberg does not attempt to render the judge a positive figure; indeed, a whitewashed perception of the judge would undermine the proposed a fortiori logic. Blomberg does take pains to construe the nobleman positively, writing, “we are given no idea what the master does with the returns on investments. We could easily imagine him being wonderfully beneficent” (Interpreting the Parables, 274), and “Yes, there are unjust dimensions to earthly kingdoms, though finding them in this particular narrative requires reading the nobleman’s motives in a uniformly bad light, which the text itself does not suggest” (280).

So far as I can tell, Blomberg is proposing a fortiori logic not from an unjust figure to an all-just figure (as from the unjust judge to God), but from a mundane event to an eschatological one. The proposed logic is something like: if even an earthly throne claimant slaughters his enemies when he returns with power, how much more will Jesus slaughter his enemies upon his eschatological return.

27 Ibid., 280.
2.2 Luke 19:27: An Open-Ended Conclusion

Luke 19:27 often stupefies modern readers. As Schultz puts it, “it has been preferable *de le passer sous silence* or to gloss over it somehow.”²⁸ In fact, the entire parable is relatively neglected in parable studies, an object of distaste.²⁹

It is willful inattention to 19:27, perhaps, that prevents most who study DS from recognizing that the parable concludes with a standing order, not with an accomplished slaughter. I have discovered only two studies acknowledging this: Bailey’s and Wright’s—and Wright is merely responding to Bailey. Bailey argues:

In the text … that order is given but not carried out. The master’s enemies are not on stage when the story stops. The parable does not end, it simply stops with a final scene missing. A better option is to see this command as a statement of what the enemies *deserve* and to remember that the text does not record what they *receive*…. Many of the parables of Jesus are left open-ended. Does the older son agree to be reconciled with his father in the parable of the prodigal son? We do not know. Does the wounded man taken to the inn by the good Samaritan make it home? We are not told.³⁰

Bailey claims that to a “traditional Middle Easterner” an order is the beginning of a process of negotiation. Hence the king’s command is nothing final but rather an opening salvo in a more extended process.³¹ Wright rejects Bailey’s construal:

²⁸ Schultz, “Jesus as Archelaus,” 112.

²⁹ For example, Garwood P. Anderson prefaces his study of the parable with a telling, lighthearted remark: “I did not choose this parable because it is ‘one of my favorites.’ In fact, it is not one of my favorites. And, having spent some considerable time working on it, it is still not one of my favorites!” (“The Lukan Kingship Parable: Luke 19:11-27 in Literary Perspective,” [PhD diss., Marquette University, 2003], iii).


³¹ Bailey writes (ibid., 406-7):
If a Westener is told by his employer, “You’re fired! Clear out your desk! I want you off of the property by 5 p.m. today!” the employee will understand that he or
In an attempt to soften the story’s ending, Bailey comments that we do not hear of the nobleman’s command to slaughter his enemies being carried out; in his view it therefore has an open ending, like The Prodigal Son…. But this is implausible. The story ends where it does because, as so often, the direct speech of a character in the drama forms the climax of a vivid performance. We do not need to hear that, or how, the command was carried out, just as we do not need to hear what happened to the wounded man after the Samaritan left him at the inn. The Samaritan’s final words to the innkeeper encapsulate his character (Luke 10.35); the nobleman’s final words to his slaves encapsulate his.32

Bailey certainly does “attempt to soften the story’s ending.” His proposal that the command reflects only what the enemies deserve, it seems to me, is informed more by his desire to mitigate a problematic portrayal of Jesus than it is informed by the text or by knowledge of the “traditional Middle Easterner.” However, it is altogether possible to dismiss Bailey’s inference concerning the significance of the parable’s open ending and nevertheless maintain that DS has an open ending. Wright is correct to indicate that “often, the direct speech of a character in the drama forms the climax of a vivid performance”; and yet, as with Father’s closing speech in TS (Luke 15:32), direct speech may be simultaneously the climax of a vivid performance and a prompt to audiences to consider the ways in which the state of affairs in the storyworld might change because of the speech, e.g., Elder seeks reconciliation with his brother, Elder walks away and begins to plan his break with his family.

she is fired and start packing at once in preparation for departure at 5 p.m. A traditional Middle Easterner will listen to the same speech and conclude: “The master is clearly very upset! Hmm—I see that I have a long negotiating process ahead of me. I must seek help from my most influential friends. This is a very serious matter that requires immediate attention.”

In this parable the master’s command is an opening statement, no more. The story has no concluding scene and the reader is stimulated to reflect on the unfinished symphony that is the parable.

32 Wright, Jesus the Storyteller, 142.
When Wright asserts that “we do not need to hear that, or how, the command was carried out,” he is correct, but ironically so. The author intends to prompt audiences to ponder the states of affairs that might come about. Or so it may be inferred, given that the final, standing order (“lead [my enemies] here and kill them before me”) concludes a story consisting of the same character’s—the nobleman’s—earlier issuance of a different order (“do business”), the reports of those who variously succeed or fail to carry it out, and the king’s responses to these reports. The question as to whether and how subordinates follow orders is to the point throughout the parable.

2.3 Luke 19:27: An Unknown Sort of Thing

For a long time, my working hypothesis was that DS is an aesthetic counterpart; I thus attempted to read DS in an aesthetic mode. As with TS (Ch. 4:2.2), I was assuming

1. that DS is intended to occasion the development of the reader’s disposition toward DS-like phenomena;

2. that the author is challenging audiences to rise above carelessness, callousness, stupor, hardheartedness, superficiality, incompetence, etc., concerning DS-like phenomena; and

3. that the author is calling attention to these phenomena, insisting upon their utter significance, and seeking to create a community practiced, attuned, ready to recognize and navigate such phenomena in life.

Luke 19:27 renders aesthetic reception a distressing task. The ordered slaughter—the reader is not only to attend to it but earnestly to engage it with the various capacities of her person. I hardly knew where to begin. Derrett, prior to proposing that the slaughter be construed spiritually, intuits connections rather more instructive:

The idea of slaughtering helpless prisoners before the victorious king is very repulsive to us, recalling episodes within living memory, associated with a low level of civilization which we realize is only beneath the surface everywhere. The
intriguing of Asian and African politicians is no stranger to our breakfast-table, not to mention events nearer home.\textsuperscript{33}

When I first began to perceive the king as a human political leader ordering the slaughter of his own people, I experienced a sort of matter-of-fact repugnance and judged the nobleman negatively. Over time, however, I found myself unable to engage DS any more deeply.

Eventually, it dawned on me: confronted with 19:27, I was ignorant, thoroughly obtuse before… this sort of thing. In EDMR terminology: I seemed to have practically no domain knowledge, no personal knowledge, no emotional memories, no emotional complexity, and only the most rudimentary world standards, world sensitivities, and personal constructs concerning “this sort of thing.” I had only a hodgepodge of movie and television portrayals of political violence—all, perhaps, the relevant \textit{world knowledge} of an upper-middle class twenty-first century American, if it may be assumed that I am typical of this group.\textsuperscript{34}

Finding myself unequipped to develop my envisionment, I attempted to learn more. After various attempts to name “this sort of thing,” I came to the word “atrocity,” which led me to \textit{Emotions and Mass Atrocity}, and then to Arne Johan Vetlesen’s \textit{Evil and

\textsuperscript{33} Derrett, “Horrid Passage,” 137.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{World knowledge} is discussed in Ch. 2:1.3.1. Coming to realize my ignorance was itself a powerful \textit{entanglement experience} (Ch. 2:3.2.5).

That my ignorance was in some ways a privilege did not occur to me until even later. Living in the U.S. from the 1980s to the time of this writing (the early 2020s), I am fortunate not to have had any firsthand experience of the sort of political violence portrayed in Luke 19:27.
Human Agency: Understanding Collective Evildoing. Vetlesen discusses collective evildoing in the contexts of the Holocaust and ethnic cleansing in the former Yugoslavia. While it was clear to me that there are considerable differences between what is depicted in 19:27 and modern-day instances of collective evildoing (not to mention differences among the modern-day instances), it seemed to me that these modern-day events might be relevant without being exact analogues to 19:27.

Vetlesen defines “evil” in a “commonsensical and minimalist” way: “to do evil … is to intentionally inflict pain and suffering on another human being, against her will, and causing serious and foreseeable harm to her.” In “collective evildoing” each individual agent’s “desire to do evil” is cultivated and “channeled—amplified, exploited.”

I have come to envision 19:27 as a depiction of emergent collective evildoing, and I have engaged additional material concerned with modern-day works of collective evil.


36 Ibid., 2.

I now read the parable in terms of the constructs typical of atrocity studies. There are *perpetrators* (the king and potentially the attendants), *victims* (the citizens), and *bystanders* (any imagined storyworld third parties as well as the parable’s audience). Rather more informed about modern-day atrocities, I began to be able to explore the perspectives of each of these parties, albeit still speculatively. Aside from facilitating various engagement experiences, this approach led me to a relatively coherent construal of the parable wherein the nobleman is shrewdly manipulative and the attendants are enmeshed in his manipulation. In this way, I came to imagine the parable as The Order, which I summarize in Section 4.

3. Notes for Construing the Characters of DS

While I was researching collective evildoing, I was also investigating the inferential possibilities pertinent to construing each of the characters—I was, in a sense, “workshopping” the characters. Regarding Slave 1 and Slave 2, several inferences mutually reinforce a simple construal: Slave 1 and Slave 2 are corrupt, and as subordinates, exceptionally able (3.1). Regarding the nobleman, several inferences meet

38 Slave 3, it is perhaps to be construed, attempts to position himself as a bystander.

39 There is the potential for this strategy of engagement to devolve into a sort of exploitation in which the real-life horrors suffered by others are crassly used to supercharge the experience of reading the parable. Tania Oldenhage criticizes Ricoeur for doing something similar, though much more subtle (*Parables for Our Time: Rereading New Testament Scholarship after the Holocaust*, American Academy of Religion Cultural Criticism Series [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002], 124-38). In “Biblical Hermeneutics” Ricoeur employs the term “limit-rhetoric,” which he adopts from Karl Jaspers, for whom “the idea of limit-situations has Holocaust resonances” (Oldenhage, *Parables*, 124). Ricoeur associates parables with limit-experience but never explicitly addresses the Holocaust. In effect, “Ricoeur’s notion of limit-experiences brings the Holocaust on the stage—not to the center but into the background, where it potentially invigorates the hermeneutic discourse” (136).
in a core construal: the nobleman is tyrannical and shrewd. Given the abundance of material, this core construal may be further refined in divergent ways (3.2). The attendants are best construed as relatively untested public slaves and military personnel who will enact or fail to enact the king’s horrid order in various ways (3.3). The citizens may be noble or self-serving in their opposition to the nobleman; the reactions of various citizens to the failure of their delegation may be speculatively imagined (3.4). Finally, regarding Slave 3, three sorts of construals are consistent with the text: Slave 3 lacks the competence to “do business” with the mina; Slave 3 fails to “do business”; and slave 3 refuses to “do business” (3.5).

3.1 Slave 1 and Slave 2

Slave 1 and Slave 2 are among the ten slaves called by the nobleman, entrusted with a mina apiece, and ordered to do business during his absence (19:13). They are among those summoned to report to the king (19:15), and each report is included in the parable as direct discourse: κύριε, ἡ μνᾶ σου δέκα προσηργάσατο μνᾶς (19:16); ἡ μνᾶ σου, κύριε, ἐποίησεν πέντε μνᾶς (19:18). Several things may be inferred from their reports. First, the enormity of their returns—tenfold (19:16) and fivefold (19:18)—is strong evidence that they have engaged in iniquitous behavior. There is no legitimate way for them to have made the reported gains. Richard B. Vinson writes,

How do you increase your capital tenfold in a short time? Luke leaves it to the audience’s imagination, but clearly something shady happened. There was no ancient stock market or buying of oil futures; ordinary moneylenders could hardly get away with charging 1,000% interest; no commercial venture, such as investing in shipping grain or buying property to rent to others could have turned so large a profit without years of patience. In their world, such a huge return could only
have come at someone else’s expense, and bribery, influence-peddling, or outright theft would probably strike the audience as likely.\textsuperscript{40}

Second, both reports are brief, only seven words apiece. Both slaves manage to convey what is important without wasting their king’s time. Third, in both reports the phrasing is similar. Both say that their lord’s mina produced more. Before their king, both slaves are self-effacing rather than self-aggrandizing. Each has made an extraordinary profit but neither mentions himself at all; neither recounts anything of his own cunning or toil in doing business.\textsuperscript{41} Fourth, it may be inferred that both slaves intend to flatter their king. They speak of their king’s money as being potent, virile. Fifth, both slaves are socially adept: whatever they have done to make the money, it has involved forging

\textsuperscript{40} Vinson, “Minas Touch,” 74-75; emphasis added. I have not discovered a more plausible explanation for Slave 1 and Slave 2’s extraordinary profit. Those who present Slave 1 and Slave 2 as positive figures dismiss the question of the means. Blomberg, for example, claims that “The exact amounts of money the servants are given are not relevant, nor are the amounts they make through their investment” (\textit{Interpreting the Parables}, 270). Blomberg is referring more immediately to The Talents rather than DS, but lets the comment stand for both. He never addresses the considerable difference between The Talents and DS on this point. In The Talents, the first two slaves only double their money (Matt 25:16-17); in DS the returns are preposterous.

Likewise, a conclusion drawn by Joel R. Wohlgemut, though tenable with regard to The Talents, is much less so regarding DS (“Entrusted Money [Matthew 25:14-28]: The Parable of the Talents/Pounds,” in Shillington, \textit{Jesus and His Parables}, 119):

I insist that the amazing gains reported on the entrusted sums in the parable are exactly that, amazing. The brevity with which their acquisition is described is not designed to provoke investigation, but rather amazement… I do not believe that listeners would have been enraged through reflection on the hypothetical sources of such revenue, but rather would have laughed at the third servant for missing out on such an apparently glorious opportunity. In the case of DS, first-century audiences will not have needed to engage in “reflection on the hypothetical sources of such revenue,” although modern-day audiences may have to go through such a process; first-century audiences will have instantly, automatically inferred corruption of some kind from the “amazing gains.”

\textsuperscript{41} Similarly, Bailey construes Slave 1 and Slave 2 as examples of humility: “Humility is appropriate in service. The faithful servant tells the master, ‘Your pound has produced…’ (rather than, ‘My hard work has achieved…’)” (\textit{Jesus}, 403, 408).
and/or navigating relationships with others. Sixth, it may be inferred that both slaves demonstrate loyalty: it is likely that, in the course of their profit-making, they openly associated themselves with the nobleman although his royal power was not entirely secure.\textsuperscript{42} Seventh, it may be inferred that the two slaves are tactful. Neither discloses anything of the crude, corrupt practices underlying their fantastic profits. Reporting to their king, both slaves maintain a façade of decency. Altogether, these various inferences support an overarching construal: Slave 1 and Slave 2 are exceptional subordinates. Additionally, one may speculate that both slaves have enriched themselves with profits they do not declare.\textsuperscript{43}

\textsuperscript{42} Bailey considers this especially significant. He argues that 19:15 indicates that the nobleman wants to know from the slaves “what business they had transacted” (ibid., 402):

\begin{quote}
If the master wants to find out what has been gained by trading, he will ask some form of “Show me the money.” But if he is asking, “How much business have you transacted?” he is seeking to discover the extent to which they have openly and publicly declared their loyalty to him during the risky period of his absence. A quick perusal of the account books will reveal the scope of the servants’ public exposure as loyal servants of the absent nobleman.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{43} Herzog (though referring to The Talents) speculates that it would have been an open secret that the slaves, acting as “retainers,” enriched themselves by way of “honest graft” \textit{(Parables as Subversive Speech}, 160):

\begin{quote}
But what was in it for the retainer? In a word, the opportunity for “honest graft.” This much is implied by the time indicators. The first two servants go to work “at once” \textit{(eutheōs)} and double their investment even though the master is gone for “a long time.” Their industry reflects the zeal with which they work the system to make a handsome return for the master, but it also reflects their desire to use some portion of that endowment to feather their own nests. First things first: the master’s initial investment must be secured, then doubled; after that, the retainers can make their profit. They are always walking a tightrope, keeping the master’s gain high enough to appease his greed and not incur his wrath while keeping their own accumulations of wealth small enough not to arouse suspicion yet lucrative enough to insure their future. The master knows the system too, and as long as the retainers keep watch of his interests and maintain a proper yield, he does not begrudge their gains. In fact, he stands to gain a great deal by encouraging the
3.2 The Nobleman/King

The ascending nobleman features in the parable more than any other character. The story begins and ends with him. Every sentence either refers to him or is spoken by him. He speaks six times and more of DS is in his voice (111 words) than in any other voice, including the narrator’s (92 words). It is readily inferable from the text that the king is tyrannical (3.2.1) and shrewd (3.2.2). Additionally, there is material enough to elaborate further the king’s character in various ways. I thus conclude my discussion of the king with a list of observations useful for envisioning his character (3.2.3).

3.2.1 The Nobleman/King as Tyrannical

The nobleman is tyrannical: he seeks a client kingship, promotes the exploitation of his people for his own profit, and orders the slaughter of his personal enemies. His first act (as disclosed in the narrative, though out of chronological order) is to seek power for himself: he goes to a “distant country” to be made a king (19:12b). As is widely recognized, “Against the background of Jewish history, this ‘distant land’ is Rome, where all the Herodian kings received their vassal kingships: Herod the Great, his sons Archelaus and Antipas, and his nephew Herod Agrippa.” Being “well born,” he may have sought a way to put his advantages to use for his fellow citizens; instead, he seeks power for himself. There is no evidence to infer that he seeks power with good intentions. He is not shown using his power to serve his subjects.

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process. Not only do the retainers do his dirty work, exploiting others for profit, but they siphon off anger that would otherwise be directed at him and his class.

44 The king speaks more than any other parabolic character in Luke. Nearest him are the rich man and Abraham (Luke 16:19-31), each of whom speaks 69 words and only three times.

45 Schottroff, *Parables of Jesus*, 182.
When he seeks administrators, he grants authority according to one criterion: the ability to amass money. He does not question the preposterous returns Slave 1 and Slave 2 declare, though the profits are conspicuous evidence of iniquitous conduct. Rather, he praises Slave 1 and puts both slaves in charge of cities (19:17,19).46 In Schottroff’s words, “Now the slaves can relate in grand style what they have so successfully accomplished on a small scale: exploiting people and land to increase the wealth of their master—as Herod’s slaves did.”47

46 As Vinson puts it, “Servant Number One is thus most likely a rapacious ‘anything for a buck’ kind of guy, and his master calls him ‘good’ and puts him in charge of ten of his new cities” (“Minas Touch,” 75).

47 Schottroff, Parables of Jesus, 185. Portrayals rendering the king generous are suspect. Anderson writes of the king being “exceedingly generous,” and of the granting of authority to Slave 1 and Slave 2 as “extravagantly gratuitous” (“Lukan Kingship Parable,” 97). Similarly, Bailey claims (Jesus, 407):

At the beginning of the story the master gave his servants gifts that they neither earned nor in any way deserved. He demonstrated his generosity. That same generosity was again verified by the manner in which he treated his faithful servants on his return. He was even generous with the unfaithful servant, who had his pound taken from him but was not fined, punished, or even dismissed. But the slaves are not given “gifts”; they are entrusted with money and commanded to do business: they are given jobs. There is no reason to infer that the king employs them out of beneficence; rather, he entrusts the money in order to find able administrators. This is readily inferable from the king’s treatment of the profitable slaves: he does not treat them with generosity, he promotes them, enlists them in his administration because they have demonstrated their ability—and, perhaps, as Bailey would have it, their loyalty. The king’s treatment of Slave 3 is odd and, I think, open for imaginative exploration. At the very least it may be taken as evidence to infer that the king has not been generous: the mina entrusted to Slave 3 is still the property of the king, and the king does as he pleases with it. As it happens, he orders it taken away. Slave 1 and Slave 2 both refer to the minas entrusted to them as the king’s: all the money belongs to him, as do the positions of authority. Slave 1 and Slave 2 will perhaps enjoy a life of luxury greater than they imagined, but they will serve at the pleasure of the new king. As subordinate administrators, they will extract wealth from the populace and deliver the bulk of it to the king. If they fail, the king will do with them as he pleases.

Scott also claims that the “master” acts in a generous manner with the profitable slaves (Hear Then the Parable, 234). This argument is sounder, but it does not pertain to...
At the end of the parable the king uses his royal power to order the rounding up and execution of his personal enemies. He pursues vengeance and the consolidation of his power. It is clear: the man is tyrannical.

3.2.2 The Nobleman/King as Shrewd

The king is also shrewd: he makes the period of his absence into a test; he makes the mina reckoning into a public demonstration of his power; and he stipulates an effective procedure for the slaughter of his enemies. I will discuss each of these in turn.

First, the king devises a way to put the time of his absence to use. He entrusts his slaves with minas and commands them to “do business” (19:13) as a test. His purpose is to identify the ones most capable for a position in his future administration—this becomes apparent when the king grants Slave 1 and Slave 2 authority over cities (19:17, 19). Thus the king is shrewd—thoughtful, forward-looking, efficient. He manages to use even the period of his absence to ensure that he will be better positioned should he receive the kingship.

Second, the king uses the occasion of reckoning with the mina-entrusted slaves to demonstrate his power. When the king returns, he has his slaves called to account (19:15). Present at this accounting are attendants (19:24). When the king praises Slave 1, discloses his reasoning for the praise, promotes Slave 1 and Slave 2 (19:17,19), upbraids Slave 3 (19:22-23), and orders that Slave 3 be dispossessed (19:24), he does so publicly:

DS or even to The Talents, it pertains only to the parable from which these supposedly descended, A Man Entrusts Property, a narrative substantially different from DS.
all those present witness his power (to give and to take) and learn his principles/style of
governance.48

Taken this way, the public accounting is a fitting prelude to the king’s order to
slaughter his enemies. Through the public accounting the nobleman primes the
prospective slaughterers for loyalty: having witnessed the accounting, they know that
“faithfulness in this very small thing” (for them, murdering fellow countrymen) may lead
to a promotion, a reward; they know that failure may lead to humiliation and
dispossession. For the attendants, the stakes have been raised. The slaves have dealt in
money; the attendants are to deal in lives. It is immediately after the attendants question
the king’s order to transfer the mina that the king gives the order to kill those who have
opposed him in the past (19:25-27). An alert attendant hears this order as a threat: death
is the penalty for resistance; it is time to kill or be killed.49

48 Schottroff likewise notes the public manner in which Slave 3 is to be
dispossessed (Parables of Jesus, 185).

49 In a particularly disturbing story, Rieff describes a kill-or-be-killed tactic
employed by Bosnian Serb forces to initiate noncommittal or oppositional Serbs into the
cause of ethnic cleansing (Slaughterhouse, 110):
The Bosnian Serb forces tailored their tactics to the kind of area in which they
were operating. It was one thing to lay siege to Sarajevo, but in the ethnically
mixed villages of Bosnia, the fighters could not pursue ethnic cleansing
successfully on their own. They had to transform those local Serbs who were
either still undecided about joining the fight or frankly opposed to it into their
accomplices. The natural impulse for self-preservation was the fighters’ greatest
ally, providing they could summon up the necessary ruthlessness. One common
method used was for a group of Serb fighters to enter a village, go to a Serb
house, and order the man living there to come with them to the house of his
Muslim neighbor. As the other villagers watched, he was marched over and the
Muslim brought out. Then the Serb would be handed a Kalashnikov assault rifle
or a knife—knives were better—and ordered to kill the Muslim. If he did so, he
had taken that step across the line the Chetniks had been aiming for. But if he
refused, as many did, the solution was simple. You shot him on the spot. Then
you repeated the process with the next Serb householder. If he refused, you shot
The result is that just as the nobleman has found a way to make the time of his absence useful, so too he devises a way to make the event of the accounting useful. The accounting is a demonstration of the king’s power and principles to those he commands to slaughter. The attendants are shown that those ordered to do business become subject to reward and punishment. They may expect similar treatment. Perhaps the king will give faithful killers authority over units or a special squad; perhaps the king will allow faithful killers to keep their victims’ property as spoils—after all, to the one who has, more will be given. Perhaps the king will execute anyone who resists or fails—on the principle that from the one who has nothing, even what he has will be taken away. By conducting the mina accounting in public, the nobleman contrives to make an evil task both an opportunity and a threat. Advertising the prospects of reward and punishment, the nobleman manipulates the attendants, coercing them to perpetrate the slaughter.

Finally, the very procedure ordered for the slaughter—though nothing novel—may itself evidence calculation. Those who did not want the nobleman to be king over them are not only to be executed, they are to be led to the king and slaughtered before him (19:27). It may be that the king desires to take pleasure in dominating and destroying each of his enemies—that he is sadistic. But this is not the only possible inference. The slaughter procedure evidences the king’s shrewdness. It has several practical benefits, such as the following:

1. the procedure ensures that the king will not have to rely on reports. He will see for himself that his enemies are in fact killed or not; otherwise a subordinate might lie—having accepted a bribe or simply failed;

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him. The Chetniks rarely had to kill a third Serb. As a fighter in Bosanska Krupa, who, to my astonishment, boasted of the tactic, informed me gleefully, “By the third house, they’re shitting themselves and asking you where you want the Muslim shot, and how many times.”
2. the procedure enables the would-be killer to kill. The process of forcibly leading the victim to the place of slaughter not only humiliates him/her but also dehumanizes him/her in the would-be killer’s perception, enabling the would-be killer to kill.\(^{50}\) In addition, standing in the king’s court, standing before the king, the would-be killer is situated in an environment of maximum pressure to perform. In a different context, hesitating, he may have failed;\(^{51}\)

3. being semi-ritualistic, slaughtering a victim before the king is a way for the killer to pledge loyalty, to commit himself, to be initiated into the king’s cult, into a community of perpetrators;

4. the procedure creates an opportunity for the victim to beg for mercy. In one case or another, the king might reason that it is more to his benefit to spare the person;\(^{52}\)

5. the procedure becomes a spectacle: the enemies are rounded up, led through the streets, and slaughtered before the king. By making a show of his retribution, the king engenders fear in the populace, deterring opposition.

Whether or not the king is in fact sadistic, it serves him well to be seen as such.

Whatever the case, the king is terribly shrewd. The contrivance of the mina test, the coercion of the attendants, and the stipulation of the slaughter procedure all attest to this.

\(^{50}\) Vetlesen, *Evil and Human Agency*, 227. Likewise, if the victim-to-be was some sort of leading figure, the man might have had honor in his very bearing—palpable honor, gravitas—which, left intact, might prevent the would-be killer from acting. J. E. Lendon recounts such an event described by Valerius Maximus (Val. Max. 2.10.6) (*Empire of Honour: The Art of Government in the Roman World* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005 (1997)], 47):

> Emphasis on Graeco-Roman honour as a quality conferred on an individual by an aristocratic community as a whole tends to conceal its physical realness, its visible quality to the Roman mind. When the great Gaius Marius was at the nadir of his fortunes, a slave was sent to murder him, but dropped his sword and fled—“blinded by the prestige of the man,” as Valerius Maximus has it.


\(^{52}\) It is only in this very attenuated sense that I can share Bailey’s view that the order to slaughter is but the opening proposal in some sort of process of negotiation (*Jesus*, 406-7).
3.2.3 Minor Notes Concerning the Nobleman/King

The reader’s impression of the king may develop further if she considers additional details, including the following:

1. the parable begins with reference to the nobleman’s birth (he is “well born” [19:12b]) and ends with reference to death at his command (19:27);

2. the king’s declaration that those who have will be given more (19:26) has been true for the king: he is “well born” (19:12b); he is given a kingship (19:15);

3. the nobleman’s enemies send a delegation “after” him (following him, behind him) (19:14); the king orders that the enemies be led and slaughtered “before” him (in front of him);

4. the king refers to his enemies as those who “did not want [him] to be king over them” (19:27). He will be over them literally as they die by his royal command. Once dead, they will not be under his authority. In an ironic way, the king fulfills their wish;

5. the relationship between the king and the distant country parallels the relationship between Slave 1 and Slave 2 and the king. The distant country gives the king power over a kingdom; the king gives Slave 1 and Slave 2 power over cities. To the distant country, the king is as a slave;

6. though Slave 3 offers the entrusted mina back to the king (19:20), the king does not directly accept it (19:24). The reason for this is unclear;\(^{53}\)

7. while the king restates Slave 3’s characterization of him (19:22), neither the king nor the narrator discloses the king’s opinion about the characterization;\(^{54}\)

\(^{53}\) Of course, all the minas belong to the king. Just as the king does what he likes with the mina in Slave 3’s possession, he may do what he likes with the minas in Slave 1 and Slave 2’s possession.

\(^{54}\) It is not certain that the king responds “in anger,” as Wohlgemut claims (“Entrusted Money,” 118). Critical to Scott’s reading of A Man Entrusts Property is the claim that the master does not accept Slave 3’s characterization (Hear Then the Parable, 234):

The master never accepts the description of the third servant’s aphorism but points back to the first two servants. His refusal to take back the talent implies his rejection of that image. A hearer is asked to choose between two competing images of the master: the explicit image put forward in aphorism by the third servant, and the image implied in the actions of the first two servants. Is the
8. the king speaks proverbially twice (19:17, 26) and declares that he will judge Slave 3 “from out of his own mouth” (19:22). This air of wisdom may be an authentic mannerism or an affectation;

9. the king calls Slave 3 “wicked,” publicly judges him, and orders that the mina entrusted to him be taken away. This is the entirety of his direct response to Slave 3. Perhaps the king is lenient. Perhaps he intends to demonstrate his ability to exercise restraint and dispassionate judgement. Perhaps the king believes it to be (or means to show it to be) beneath his honor to concern himself further with Slave 3 and a mina. Or maybe the king is distracted by the attendants’ interjection. The significance of the king’s response is unclear.

3.3.1 The Attendants as Untested Public Slaves and Military Personnel

The parable discloses little about the attendants. They witness the mina accounting, they are ordered to transfer the mina from Slave 3 to Slave 1, and they are ordered to gather and kill the king’s enemies. The attendants act only once, maybe twice, as I will suggest. They respond to the king’s order to transfer the mina: κύριε, ἔχει δέκα μνᾶς (19:25). The concern voiced in this brief statement is unclear. Four possibilities are consistent with the text:

1. the attendants object to giving the mina to one who has so much;

master the hardhearted man of the third servant’s attack, or is he gracious and generous, as he was toward the first two servants?

In the context of DS, it may be that the king rejects Slave 3’s characterization for a different reason. To speculate, it may be that the king means to be known in terms more grandiose. A mina is nothing to him: great wealth and now the state belong to him. Trench observes that the king is shown “having power of life and death” (Notes on the Parables, 389). Vetlesen happens to use a similar phrase when discussing perpetrators of atrocities. Rejecting the preposterous view that perpetrators act from moral motives, Vetlesen asks rhetorically (“Social Science and the Study of Perpetrators,” in Brudholm and Lang, Emotions and Mass Atrocity, 109; emphasis added):

What about the opposite hypothesis, that perpetrators of violence are not morally motivated, but are instead motivated by sadism, by the joy of exerting power over defenseless others, of doing unto them whatever they might find conducive to their wish to dominate others, to be masters of life and death and to exploit extraordinary circumstance (such as war) to enact what is ordinarily a pure fantasy, and enact it with impunity?

Ordering the slaughter of his enemies, the king responds implicitly to Slave 3, and responds for all to witness: I am no mere reaper of minas, I am master of life and death.
2. the attendants want that the mina be given to one of them;
3. the attendants are expressing, in good faith, surprised incomprehension;
4. Some combination of the three possibilities above.\textsuperscript{55}

Whatever the reason for the interjection, from the fact that the attendants do not immediately carry out the order it may be inferred that they are not entirely disciplined and subservient. Whether they are ready and willing to fulfill the king’s final order is an open question.

The text does not say who the attendants are. Hultgren writes:

The attendants (19:24) seem to appear out of nowhere. They could simply be persons of the realm, subjects to the master, or they could be the other nine slaves to whom the money had been entrusted (19:13). More likely, they are additional personnel in the master’s company, that is, personal attendants, bodyguards, and the like (cf. 1 Kings 9:22; 10:8).\textsuperscript{56}

The attendants do “seem to appear out of nowhere.” There is the slightest suggestion of the presence of others in the text prior to 19:24. When the nobleman returns with royal power (19:15), he has the slaves called (εἶπεν φωνῇ μνημεία αὐτῷ τοὺς δούλους).

The phrasing stipulates that there is at least one other party, whoever goes and gets the mina-entrusted slaves.\textsuperscript{57}

\textsuperscript{55} For some time I entertained the idea that the attendants are opposed to taking the mina from Slave 3, leaving him with nothing. But this is implausible. Slave 3 is offering the mina back to the king and the mina is the king’s money. To imagine the attendants expressing concern for Slave 3 is not adequate to the text.

\textsuperscript{56} Hultgren, Parables, 287.

\textsuperscript{57} In contrast, when the nobleman calls his slaves before he leaves (19:13), the phrasing does not necessarily implicate a third party (καλέσας δὲ δέκα δούλους ἕαυτοῦ ἔδωκεν αὐτοῖς δέκα μνᾶς).
The attendants are most probably “additional personnel in the master’s company.”

There is good reason to suppose that first-century audiences will have imagined the ruler accompanied by personnel without any explicit statement in the text. Officials of various rank across the Roman Empire were usually accompanied by certain personnel. In the western empire especially, there was a standard cast of personnel:

Most important, though, are the regular attendants of magistrates, known collectively as *apparitores*. The four main positions were criers (*praecones*), lictors, “waymen” (*viatores*, who ran errands and delivered messages and summonses), and professional clerks (*scribae*). They all seem to have developed at an early date along with the offices themselves (indeed, the *fasces*-bearing lictors who accompanied magistrates with *imperium* were Etruscan in origin). In Rome, these men formed corporations of rotating panels (*decuriae*), divided by office and magisterial rank, from which magistrates drew appointees. With the growth of the empire, the system branched out into provinces and lasted into Byzantine times, although it grew ever more ceremonial.58

Sometimes public slaves accompanied officials. In the west, these public slaves were in addition to the *apparitores* proper. In the east, where customs varied, public slaves often fulfilled the offices of *apparitores*. Public slaves “could also accompany magistrates, help them make arrests, and otherwise impose their will; when acting as such enforcers, public slaves were often called *ministri*.“59 For provincial governors, those who alone had authority to command soldiers and issue capital punishment within their given province, there were even more personnel, including members of the governor’s “official staff (*officium*).” A governor’s *officium* included military subordinates.60


59 Ibid., 64-65.

60 Ibid., 172-73, 186. DS is not explicitly set in the Roman Empire and the nobleman appears to become a client king rather than a provincial governor. Nevertheless, audiences will have drawn from their experience of Roman rule.
First-century audiences could be expected to have *schematic knowledge* pertaining to officials in public, wherein an official is always accompanied by various personnel.\(^{61}\) Those who summon the mina-entrusted slaves (19:15) function as *viatores*. Those ordered to round up and slaughter the king’s enemies function as *lictors*. An audience from the west might have imagined formal, *fasces*-bearing *lictors*. An audience from the east (including any audience of Jesus) will have imagined public slaves (*ministri*). But both westerners and easterners probably imagined military personnel as well.

To any audience imagining formal, Roman style *apparitores*, the interjection of 19:25 will have been understood as an expression of surprised incomprehension, an honest attempt by the attendants to make sure that they have heard the king correctly, as the command strikes them as nonsensical. To an audience imagining a mixture of public slaves and military personnel, any of the four possibilities above would be intelligible, especially given the fledgling state of the new administration. As the appointments of Slave 1 and Slave 2 demonstrate (19:17, 19), the king is in the process of establishing his administration. There is a working body of attendants, but the king is still determining whom he will keep and in what roles.\(^{62}\) To construe the attendants as a relatively untested

\(^{61}\) I discuss *schematic knowledge* above in Ch. 2:1.3.4. Audiences would automatically envision the presence of personnel accompanying the ruler just as I would automatically imagine the presence of other players on the football field if I were to hear that a certain quarterback ran for a first down. Indeed, if the quarterback were alone, that would be exceptional—incomprehensible, really. In these cases, it would be the absence of others rather than their presence that would need to be indicated and explained.

\(^{62}\) The king may not have had much of an established military. Herod had a royal army: Archelaus inherited most of it; Antipas and Philip both inherited only a small fraction (Christopher B. Zeichmann, *The Roman Army and the New Testament* [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018], 32). Hence, to an author/audience whose frame of
mixture of public slaves and military personnel is textually and culturally warranted. As I imagine it, these attendants will work with teams of subordinates or associates, not present, to enact the king’s final order.

3.3.2 The Attendants and the Material Enactment of the Order

The attendants are enmeshed in the king’s designs, at once tantalized with reward and threatened with punishment. Ordered to gather and slaughter the king’s enemies, each one must respond to the prospect of perpetrating a massacre in service of the new king. Studies of DS have done little to dispel a notion implicit in allegorical readings, that 19:27 refers to some kind of ideal, pristine slaughter. For example, Trench identifies the attendants as angels who “never fail to appear and take an active part in scenes descriptive of the final judgment.” If the attendants are angels and the slaughter is final judgment, then God’s will is enacted instantly, purely, perfectly… presumably. The notion of a pristine slaughter remains implicit, however, so long as the realities of an earthly slaughter are not considered. That is, whenever Luke 19:27 is registered with something like, and the king’s enemies are slaughtered, there is a double presumption: that the king’s order is simple and straightforward; and that the king’s order is instantly and perfectly enacted. But both aspects of this presumption are suspect. Luke 19:27 has so frequently been comprehended by way of a final judgement schema that even when an overarching allegorical construal is explicitly rejected, the schema has continued to exert its influence.

reference was early first-century Palestine, the imaginary new king may or may not have had a substantial military. We simply do not know.

63 Trench, Notes on the Parables, 391.
Yes, supposing God is one to slaughter, God certainly knows exactly who God’s enemies are; God orders slaughtered only those who truly are enemies; the execution is more instantaneous than the slice of a guillotine; and the whole ordeal is as just as it is possible for slaughter to be. But when all the actors are human, the process of rounding up and slaughtering enemies is horrific, inexact, and corrupt. First-century audiences will have been thoroughly knowledgeable here, state brutality and corruption being the norm. Something of the brutality common in the first-century Mediterranean world is reflected in the sculpture “Claudius and Britannia.” Zeichmann captions an image of the sculpture thus:

Military conquest almost invariably resulted in sexual assault of the defeated in the Greco-Roman period. The emperor Claudius is here depicted as preparing to rape a woman—the personified Britannia—symbolic of his military victory in that region. The sculpture was erected in 48 CE in the Asian city of Aphrodisias (now in Turkey). A similar sculpture depicts the emperor Nero raping Armenia, again

Fuhrmann documents the regularity of corruption among provincial governors (Policing the Roman Empire, 177-81) as well as the regularity of civilian brutalization at the hands of soldiers (230-37). Gabriel Baker claims that Greek and Roman authors assume that their audiences know—have personal knowledge about—what happens to conquered populations (Spare No One: Mass Violence in Roman Warfare, War and Society [Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2020], 35). Baker has compiled two appendixes showing the prevalence of exterminations (ibid., 213-42): “124 Cases of Mass Violence in Roman Warfare, c. 400–100 BCE”; and “181 Cases of Mass Violence in Ancient Mediterranean Warfare (excluding Rome), c. 500–100 BCE.” David Konstan begins his essay on mass exterminations in antiquity, “One can only reflect with sorrow on the fact that there is nothing new about mass extermination. There was an abundance of killings en masse in classical antiquity. Julius Caesar delighted in recording the numbers of enemy slain in his 10-year campaign” (“Mass Exterminations and the History of Emotions: The View from Classical Antiquity,” in Brudholm and Lang, Emotions and Mass Atrocity, 23-25).

An image is included in Kenan T. Erim’s report on the discovery of the relief in 1980 (“A New Relief Showing Claudius and Britannia from Aphrodisias,” Britannia 13 [1982]: ii); also widely available online.
personified as a subjugated woman. Narrative depictions of such sexual assault in ancient literature are too numerous to list.  

In “Claudius and Britannia,” conquest is celebrated as rape, marmoreally. Indeed, far from anything just and pristine, a realistic enactment of the king’s order to gather and slaughter his enemies will have involved the following elements:

1. physical confrontation: When Jesus is arrested, in Luke’s account one of Jesus’s disciples cuts off the ear of a slave of the high priest (22:50) and the arresting party is armed with swords and clubs (22:52). Some of the king’s enemies will resist their captors. Some will prepare entire households for a fight, arming brothers, sons, slaves, women, and even children with swords, clubs, agricultural tools, stones, etc. The pursuit of some enemies will be dangerous; some attendants will die. The attendants will have to organize to attack strong opponents, and members of the enemy households will be killed in the ensuing melee. Parties on all sides will sustain all manner of injury;

2. spoils: In Luke’s account, Jesus’s crucifiers cast lots to divide Jesus’s garments (23:34). The attendants will similarly lay claim to property of the king’s enemies. Desirable clothing, armor, weaponry, food, money, anything easily possessed, will be seized. Women (and men and children) will be raped and/or claimed for the attendant or the king. Children will be orphaned, trafficked, and killed. The residences will become the king’s property;

66 Zeichmann, Roman Army, 69.

67 Fuhrmann observes, “All members of the household, including slaves, were expected to defend their residence and storage facilities from illegal intruders” (Policing the Roman Empire, 50). Baker specifies the practice of arming women and children, though in the context of defending one’s city from a siege (Spare No One, 38).

68 The arrest of some citizens may have resembled the sacking of a city. Baker writes (ibid., 40):

Roman city-sacking was a disordered and terrifying process. The Latin word used to describe the sack was diripere, which “consisted in letting soldiers loose, in giving them unrestricted freedom to loot, rape and slaughter” (to quote historian Adam Ziolkowski). Moreover, both Livy and Polybius use the language of “dispersing” or “rushing” when they describe soldiers sacking cities, indicating that these events were largely unorganized, potentially chaotic, and certainly horrific. Some soldiers would break into houses and temples seeking valuables. Others would continue to kill for the sake of robbery or simply for sport. Others still would seize and sexually assault “young women or handsome youths.”
3. group stratification: In the enactment of the king’s order, the attendants will negotiate the relative status of each member. A high-risk job—who has to do it? Attractive spoils—who gets them? One way or another, some will attain dominance and others will be relegated to positions of greater subservience. Some attendants will rise in the king’s esteem; others will fall, becoming altogether disposable;

4. pride: Some attendants will grow arrogant. I am commissioned to do a difficult job that others could not do, a brutal job that others are too weak to perform. I am an agent of the king. The attendants are authorized to humiliate, control, and ultimately kill other people; they will regularly experience themselves as dominators;\(^{69}\)

5. killing: Torture often preceded execution.\(^{70}\) Decapitation by axe or sword was the typical method of execution.\(^{71}\) The task was difficult. Executioners sometimes failed to kill in a single blow. Fatigue and damage to the weapon yielded sloppy work;\(^{72}\)

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Dowling’s study of \(\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\sigma\phi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega\) associates DS with two mass killings described in 2 Macc., one of which involves an order that women and children be sold (\textit{Taking Away the Pound}, 83-84):

The verb \(\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\sigma\phi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega\), which is used in the Parable of the Pounds, occurs eleven times in the LXX. Of these eleven occurrences of \(\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\sigma\phi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega\), eight are in 2 Maccabees. In 2 Macc. 5:11-14, Antiochus who is king, \(\beta\alpha\sigma\iota\lambda\epsilon\upsilon\varsigma\) (2 Macc. 5.11), returns from Egypt, thinking that Judea is in revolt, and commands his soldiers to cut down all they meet and to slaughter (\(\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\sigma\phi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega\)) those who go into their houses (2 Macc. 5.12). Eighty thousand are destroyed in three days (2 Macc. 5.14). Following this, Antiochus enters and profanes the temple and removes its riches (2 Macc. 5.15-20). He leaves governors to oppress the people and Menelaus is described as worse than the others in lording it over the citizens (\(\pi\omicron\lambda\omicron\tau\iota\alpha\iota\)). Out of malice to the Jewish citizens (\(\pi\omicron\lambda\omicron\tau\iota\alpha\iota\)) an army is commanded to slaughter (\(\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\sigma\phi\acute{\alpha}\zeta\omega\)) the men and sell the women and young ones. As a result, great numbers of people are killed in Jerusalem (2 Macc. 5.23-24).

\(^{69}\) These observations are informed by Johannes Lang’s study of pride in SS members in Nazi Germany (“The Proud Executioner: Pride and the Psychology of Genocide,” in Brudholm and Lang, \textit{Emotions and Mass Atrocity}, 64-80).

\(^{70}\) Baker, \textit{Spare No One}, 46.

\(^{71}\) Ibid., 46-47.

\(^{72}\) Ibid., 49-50.
6. perpetrator disgust: Violence workers, especially inexperienced ones, are likely to experience feelings of disgust while torturing and killing. The worker may feel “moral disgust over the atrocities themselves,” or “core disgust over the disfigured state of the victim,” or both—a “double disgust.”\(^{73}\) And despite popular belief, perpetrator disgust does not typically curtail violence.\(^{74}\) Organizations employing violence workers typically attempt to “manage the emotional toll of killing”; they commonly “let soldiers indulge in alcohol and partying after killing actions” and “allow (directly or indirectly) a certain amount of sadistic violence.”\(^{75}\) For some violence workers, “sadistic behavior is an effective way of coping with physical discomfort.”\(^{76}\)

3.4 The Citizens

Little is revealed about the citizens. They are characterized in a single statement:

{o}i \(\delta\) \(\epsilon\) \(\pi\)\(\lambda\)\(\iota\)\(\tau\)\(i\)\(\alpha\)\(s\) \(\alpha\)\(\nu\)\(t\)\(o\)\(u\) \(\epsilon\)\(\mu\)\(i\)\(s\)\(o\)\(u\)\(n\) \(\alpha\)\(u\)\(t\)\(o\) \(\alpha\)\(p\)\(\epsilon\)\(s\)\(t\)\(e\)\(l\)\(a\)\(n\) \(\acute{\alpha}p\)\(r\)\(e\)\(s\)\(b\)\(e\)\(i\)\(a\)\(n\) \(\acute{o}\)\(p\)\(i\)\(s\)\(o\)\(w\) \(\alpha\)\(u\)\(t\)\(o\)\(u\) \(\lambda\)\(\gamma\)\(o\)\(n\)\(t\)\(e\)\(s\)\(s\)\(e\)\(s\)\(s\)-\(o\)\(u\) \(\theta\)\(\epsilon\)\(l\)\(o\)\(m\)\(e\)\(n\) \(t\)\(o\)\(u\)\(t\)\(o\)\(n\) \(b\)\(a\)\(s\)\(i\)\(l\)\(e\)\(u\)\(s\)\(a\)\(i\) \(\acute{e}\)\(f\)\(\acute{\iota}\) \(\acute{\gamma}\)\(m\)\(\alpha\)\(s\) (19:14). The parable does not disclose why the


\(^{74}\) According to Munch-Jurisic (ibid., 157; emphasis original), [T]he destructive view of disgust emphasizes that even in cases where perpetrator disgust reflects a moral disgust, the recognition of the suffering and destruction of the other does not motivate pro-social action; instead it easily transforms into self-pity and leads to increased harm to the other. But what is it about disgust that makes it so morally impotent and even destructive?

The answer lies in the phenomenology of the feeling of disgust. Recall that disgust is an aversive emotion: it primarily motivates the subject to distance him or herself from whatever produces the uncomfortable feeling. Even if the disgust response were partly fostered by a faint empathic concern for the victim, the perpetrator is primarily concerned with his own experience of the event. In the landmark film *Shoah*, for example, SS-Untersturmführer Franz Suchomel complains about his hardships in Treblinka and exclaims, “We also cried, yes … It was hell over there. We vomited and cried.” The interesting point is not to establish whether or not Suchomel’s disgust has a moral character (this we cannot do), but simply to observe that Suchomel finds it important to convey that he has suffered.

\(^{75}\) Ibid., 158-59.

\(^{76}\) Ibid., 157-58.
citizens hate the nobleman and act to prevent his ascension. Four possibilities are reasonable, albeit speculative:

1. knowing the man to be corrupt and brutal, the citizens are concerned for their own wellbeing (they fear personal suffering);

2. knowing the man to be corrupt and brutal, the citizens are concerned for the wellbeing of one another and the kingdom (they fear harm to the community);

3. they do not oppose brutality but, as partisans, prefer a king aligned with their interests;

4. some combination of the three possibilities above.

The report that citizens oppose the nobleman (19:14) is followed by notice of the nobleman’s success in gaining power (19:15). The reader wishing to engage the citizens’ predicaments and perspectives can imagine but speculatively. Readers might consider:

1. what does a citizen experience upon learning that the delegation fails;

2. what course is a citizen to take upon learning of the delegation’s failure, e.g., pray, surrender, beg for forgiveness, appeal to a powerful friend for protection, attempt to hide or flee, prepare for attack, commit suicide, comfort oneself with wishful thinking;

3. what takes place at the arrest? In the case of one mounting a defense, what happens? A shout for help, a signal bell, or a dog’s bark might be the first notice that attackers have come. What does one witness and do;

4. what happens during the hours and moments preceding the execution;

5. what becomes of the remnants of the murdered one’s household?

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77 Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire*, 50-51, 57.

78 In some mass exterminations, those to be slaughtered are lined up in a way that allows victims to see the execution of others, to know when their turn is coming (Baker, *Spare No One*, 47-49).
3.5 Slave 3

Slave 3 is among those called, entrusted, ordered, and reckoned with (19:13, 15).

Slave 3’s report is conveyed in direct discourse: κύριε, ἰδοὺ ἡ μνή σου ἴν ἕχον ἀποκειμένην ἐν σουδαρίῳ ἑφοβούμην γάρ σε, ὅτι ἀνθρώπος αὐστηρὸς εἶ, αἴρεις ὅ πο λέγεις (19:20-21). Slave 3 either lacks the competence, fails, or refuses to profit his master.

It may be that Slave 3 is too foolish to find a way to make money, i.e., he is incompetent. As the king indicates (19:23), Slave 3 should have at least put the money in the bank to keep it safe and generate interest. If foolish, Slave 3 is either dimwitted (a simpleton) or inexperienced (an ingenu). A simpleton Slave 3 is dumbstruck to have command of such a sum. He wonders from time to time what to do with it, always concluding: *Best not to lose the master’s money.* He prizes the physical object, keeping it near and presenting it. When he speaks, he rambles, explaining himself and volunteering his impression of the king. An ingenu Slave 3 is similar, except that his actions are qualified by a youthful innocence and ignorance that might be overcome.

It may be that Slave 3 is either fearful or devious and so fails to profit the king. Slave 3 claims that he feared his master. If fear-driven, Slave 3 is either frazzled or risk-averse. A frazzled Slave 3 is disquieted by any number of things: the impossible-to-meet expectations of his “exacting” master; the personal and direct responsibility to his master (he has previously worked as an anonymous member of the staff, perhaps); the scope of his responsibility; the prospect of failure; the prospect of punishment. Fear overcomes

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79 Whether the other slaves bring their money is unclear.
him, rendering him inactive. He reports to the king in panic. Had Slave 1 or Slave 2 reported a loss, then Slave 3 will have enjoyed a surge of confidence. Instead, it is with dread and disbelief that he listens to their reports. Hence he rambles, and rather infelicitously.

Again, it may be that Slave 3 is not frazzled but risk-averse. He is cognizant of the perils of his situation and pays more heed to these perils than to the possibility of success. He enjoys a sense of relief when he conceives a plan to keep the money: he will avoid the worst possible outcomes. His report to the king is not rambling but rather infused with self-assurance. He is pleased with himself. He has navigated a dangerous situation. On the one hand, Slave 3 is not so clever or else he would have banked the money. On the other hand, he achieves his goal: the king merely scolds him and relieves him of the burdensome mina.

It may be that Slave 3 fails to profit his master because he is devious: unmotivated, thieving, or noncommittal. Unmotivated, Slave 3 chooses to keep the mina rather than do business because he does not expect he will get to enjoy the profits. His master is sure to claim everything for himself.

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80 Slave 3’s “image of the master,” Scott claims, “freezes the servant in fear” and “paralyzes him” (Hear Then the Parable, 234).

Slave 3 may be a thieving liar. Slave 3 does do business and with some success, but instead of declaring the profit, he lies. He makes a show of returning the mina to sell the lie and offers a characterization of the king as a distraction.\textsuperscript{82}

It may be that Slave 3 is noncommittal. Slave 1 and Slave 2 presumably use their connection with the future king to make money, whether those paying it are strongarmed (under duress) or eager (seeking influence). Slave 3, doubting that his master will become king, does not want to be associated with him. If some rival claimant receives the kingship, then the nobleman’s agents will perhaps be marked for slaughter.\textsuperscript{83} When the man returns as a king, Slave 3 cannot reveal the reason for his inaction, so he lies. Slave 3 appears foolish, but his foolishness is less offensive than would be his disloyalty.

Or perhaps Slave 3 refuses to profit the king because he opposes his exploitative practices. Here Slave 3 is either deliberate or indecisive. The deliberate Slave 3 preserves the mina and returns it to the king but avoids engaging personally in conduct he considers offensive. Slave 3’s speech is either a bold denunciation or rhetorically sophisticated doublespeak. In the first case, Slave 3 is a “whistleblower” (as Herzog contends) whose remarks “expose the sham of what has transpired and place it under the unobstructed light of clear analysis and prophetic judgment.”\textsuperscript{84} Slave 3 breaks the façade of decency maintained by Slave 1, Slave 2, and the king. He publicly declares the truth of who the

\textsuperscript{82} This creates a satisfying irony: a thief calling his mark a thief to distract from his theft. Given that it is at least reasonable to infer that Slave 1 and Slave 2 have skimmed from their profits, the notion that Slave 3 may have profited and kept it all is not preposterous. Regarding DS, the audience knows only what the slaves claim to have made. In contrast, the narrator of The Talents provides a presumably reliable report (Matt 25:16-18).

\textsuperscript{83} So Bailey, Jesus, 402-3.

\textsuperscript{84} Herzog, Parables as Subversive Speech, 165.
king is and what he does. He takes a stand, ready to suffer the consequences. In the second case, Slave 3 is politic, his remarks calculated simultaneously to disarm and insult. Slave 3’s declaration that he feared his master is calculated to be ingratiating: *Lord, I am so small and I hold you in awe.* \(^{85}\) Slave 3’s description of the king is calculated to register differently depending on the audience. The exploited (those hearing the parable) understand Slave 3 to be insulting the king to his face. The king, in contrast, perhaps finds the characterization gratifying: Slave 3 recognizes his exceptional ability to dominate and take. Slave 3 thus resists exploitation, insults the king, and is only scolded for it. \(^{86}\)

Finally, it may be that Slave 3 is resistant but ultimately indecisive. He cannot bring himself to “do business.” He does not want to be an exploiter. He fantasizes about the good he might do: *Your mina, sir, has secured the livelihood of one of your subjects; your mina, sir, has fed many.* But he is not ready to do anything so bold. So he does nothing. \(^{87}\)

4. Luke 19:12b-27 as The Order

Researching atrocity and imagining the parabolic characters, I first came to view the parable as The Order. This title suggests two ways of establishing the parable’s

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\(^{85}\) Wohlgemut argues convincingly that both Rohrbaugh (“Peasant Reading”) and Herzog (*Parables as Subversive Speech*) fail to account for Slave 3’s fear (“Entrusted Money,” 115-16). However, none of them considers that the narrator makes no mention of fear (either in DS or The Talents). Rather, the reference to “fear” is in direct discourse: publicly and to the king, Slave 3 claims that he feared the king. It may be that Slave 3 professes “fear” to ensure that the king does not grow angry with him. After all, it was well known that expressions of humility defuse anger (Aristotle, *Rhet.* 2.2-2.3).

\(^{86}\) So van Eck, as above (Ch. 5:1).

\(^{87}\) Vinson argues along these lines (“Minas Touch,” 76).
coherence. First, the parable describes a political order. Power resides in the “far away country.” The nobleman becomes a political functionary subordinate to that power. Slave 1, Slave 2, and the attendants are functionaries lower still, subordinate to the king. Slave 3, however he is construed, is incompatible with the order. The king’s enemies are its victims. Second, the parable progresses from one seemingly benign order (“do business” \[\pi\rho\alpha\gamma\mu\alpha\tau\epsilon\upsilon\sigma\alpha\sigma\theta\varepsilon\] [19:13]) to a final, dreadful order (“lead [my enemies] here and slaughter them before me” \[\alpha\gamma\alpha\gamma\epsilon\tau\epsilon\omega\delta\epsilon\varsigma\kappa\alpha\iota\varsigma\kappa\alpha\tau\alpha\varsigma\phi\alpha\acute{\varepsilon}\acute{\varepsilon}\alpha\tau\upsilon\tau\varsigma\varsigma\acute{\iota}\varsigma\varsigma\kappa\alpha\varsigma\epsilon\iota\varsigma\varsigma\varsigma\acute{\iota}\varsigma\mu\nu\] [19:27]). The parable shows a new king shrewdly and ruthlessly establishing his power. There is clear narrative movement: the king entrusts minas to test the slaves; the king publicly assesses the slaves to entice and threaten the attendants; and finally, having primed the attendants for loyal service, the king orders them to slaughter his enemies. The parable portrays—in a spirit of lament, perhaps—the malign influence of a bad ruler exploiting and terrorizing his subjects and debauching his workers.

Hence, Schottrof’s characterization of the import of the parable, “The Roman \textit{imperium} is brutally erected on money and power,” hides the most important aspect: people. The Roman \textit{imperium} is brutally erected on money, power, and people, those variously enabled, enticed, and coerced by the money and power.\footnote{Schottroff, \textit{Parables of Jesus}, 187.} The parable’s conclusion places its audience in the position of the attendants. Likely as it is that the attendants will do the king’s bidding, they have a choice. The slaughter can happen \textit{only if people go along with it.}

This reading has merit but also problems. First, it marginalizes Slave 3. Not only the third instance in a series of three, Slave 3 is also unique among the three and speaks
the second most words of all the characters in the parable (26 words). Though he must be a central figure, in the parable read as The Order he hardly matters. Second, the attendants play a critical role in The Order and yet they speak only four words and are never introduced. Third, the apparent lack of punishment for Slave 3 is not accounted for; in fact, the king ordering Slave 3 to be executed would be more fitting in the parable as The Order. Fourth, there is an oddity concerning Slave 3 that The Order fails to explain: Slave 3 is apparently unassertive when it comes to dealing with the mina but then startlingly assertive at the accounting.

Finally, The Order works only if the king’s order to slaughter his enemies is perceived as something extraordinary. This, of course, will not have been the case for first-century audiences.89 I am not claiming that such slaughter was considered valid or acceptable, only that audiences will not have been shocked by the order in the way that modern audiences are—or that I am, at any rate.90

89 As above (Section 2.3.2). In the context of military victory, the only routine alternative to execution was enslavement… but merely to enslave was considered a gracious act of the victor. Zeichmann recounts a “folk etymology” of the word “slaves” recorded by Florentius (Dig. 1.5.4) (Roman Army, 114-15):

Enslavement and execution were the most common outcomes for prisoners of war, with the former regarded as an act of clemency. The Roman jurist Florentius, for example, claimed in a folk etymology that “slaves (servi) are so called because commanders generally sell the people they capture and therefore save (servare) them instead of killing them.” Roman writers take pride in their prisoner-of-war policy, contrasting their willingness to let captives live with the Empire’s enemies, characterizing the latter as more cruel or brutal—no doubt exaggerating both Roman kindness and foreign malice in the process.

90 The event described by Josephus (Ant. 17. 307-8) in which a delegation is sent to Rome to communicate grievances against Herod’s regime and to plead for more just governance than Archelaus could be expected to provide is evidence that despite the “normality” of brutality and corruption, some considered it unacceptable, a violation.

As elucidated by Ari Z. Bryen, petitions from people who suffered various sorts of violence in Roman Egypt reveal the capacity of these people to “engage in a process of
5. Luke 19:12b-27 as The Disgraced Slave

Dissatisfied with The Order, I have found what I reckon a better way to construe the parable. This superior construal, The Disgraced Slave, is not intuitive to modern audiences. To understand it, an awareness of the world sensitivities (Ch. 2:3.2.2) of first-century Mediterranean people is required. The key is to recognize that Slave 3 will have seemed thoroughly repugnant. I am indebted to Robert A. Kaster’s *Emotion, Restraint, and Community in Ancient Rome* (2005) for my present understanding. In this final section of the study, I present Kaster’s findings and analysis (5.1); I describe the rhetorical program of DS (5.2); and I define DS as a rhetorical-aesthetic counterpart (5.3).

5.1 The World Sensitivities of First-Century Mediterranean Audiences

The world sensitivities of first-century Mediterranean audiences will have differed from modern-day American or indeed western sensitivities.91 Kaster’s study of emotions in ancient Rome reveals much that is helpful for envisioning DS.92 Kaster investigates the Latin emotion terms *verecundia* (worried regard/respect), *pudor* (shame), *paenitentia* (regret), *invidia* (hostility), and *fastidium* (revulsion) as they appear in the writings of the “Roman upper classes (roughly, the male members of the senatorial and actively challenging the legitimacy of what might otherwise be understood to be innocuous, necessary, or well deserved, unmasking these things for what they ‘really’ are” (*Violence in Roman Egypt: A Study in Legal Interpretation, Empire and After* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013], 74).


Granted, the audiences anticipated by Jesus and Luke may have had emotional lives different from what Kaster describes; but it is more than plausible (especially for Luke) that there is consistency between them. Kaster’s observations concerning _pudor_, _verecundia_, and _fastidium_ are particularly relevant to DS. Slave 3’s conduct is thoroughly shameful, he seems to be unaffected by _verecundia_, and his behavior will have triggered disgust in audiences automatically.

Slave 3’s conduct is cause for shame in several ways. Nothing in the parable indicates, however, that Slave 3 himself experiences shame. Instead he seems shameless, devoid of a “sense of shame.” Kaster describes the experience of _pudor_ (shame) in the following way:

> All experiences of _pudor_ depend upon notions of personal worthiness (_dignitas_) and value (_existimatio_), which in turn derive from seeing myself being seen in creditable terms. I experience _pudor_ when I see myself being seen as discredited, when the value that I or others grant that self is not what I would have it be.\(^95\)

\(^93\) Ibid., 4, 10-11.

\(^94\) Kaster grants that his results do not necessarily generalize to the Roman nonelite (ibid., 9-10):

[T]his is a study above all of the social and cultural elite, from which emerged the people—for the most part male, wealthy, and “well-bred”—who wrote the texts on which we must rely: there is no obvious way to predict how (or whether) the emotional lives of nonelites were very different.

There is thus some risk in drawing on Kaster’s study. But appeals to “peasant” sensibilities—typical in social science criticism, e.g., van Eck, _Parables_—are no more secure. Sharon Lea Mattila argues well against the critical viability of the notion of “peasants” (“Jesus and the ‘Middle Peasants’? Problematizing a Social-Scientific Concept,” _CBQ_ 72 [2010]: 291-313). Douglas E. Oakman’s defense of the term is less convincing (“Execrating? Or Execrable Peasants!” in _The Galilean Economy in the Time of Jesus_, eds. David A Fiensy and Ralph K. Hawkins [Atlanta: SBL Press, 2013], 139-64).

\(^95\) Kaster, _Emotion_, 29.
From this essential principle Kaster develops a taxonomy of six pudor-scripts. Slave 3’s conduct is shameful in three ways, in the manner of Kaster’s scripts 4, 5, and 6. The fourth pudor-script pertains to “discreditable ‘extension’ of the self,” which includes “Thrusting myself forward, especially in an importunate or precipitous manner,” for example, if I “have no sense of when to end a conversation before it becomes tediously intrusive (Plin. Pan. 24.3).”\(^96\) Slave 3 acts shamefully in this sense insomuch as he speaks excessively and impertinently in his report to the king (19:20-21).

The fifth pudor-script deals with “discreditable ‘retraction’ of the self.” It comprises “the failure to extend myself as I should in vigorous action, especially when I am more protective of my self than is thought proper through acts of cowardice, inconstancy, miserliness, laziness, or the like.”\(^97\) “In social relations,” for example, “I can avoid this form of pudor if I am willing to expend the labor—service and attendance strenuously performed—of the sort that commends me to a patron (Cic. Fam. 7.7.2).”\(^98\)

Cicero relates his experience of extreme pudor in a letter written from exile to his wife (Fam. 14.3.1-2):

> It was my duty either to avoid the danger by accepting [an honorable alternative], or to resist it with the care and resources at my disposal, or to die bravely. No alternative was more wretched, more disgraceful, more unworthy than the present state of affairs. For that reason I am overcome by pain and especially by pudor.\(^99\)

This pudor-script is often operative in military contexts:

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\(^96\) Ibid., 42-43.

\(^97\) Ibid., 45-46.

\(^98\) Ibid., 46; emphasis original.

\(^99\) Ibid., 46.
Here my sense of pudor is put on trial when I quail at doing my duty, especially in the face of danger: by hanging back (Curt. 9.4.32), by retreating (Hirt. BGall. 8.28.4), or by simply fleeing (Livy 39.49.2, Flor. 2.13). I will be especially tested, under this script, when others have conspicuously pointed the right way by showing some backbone, even to the point of laying down their lives.\textsuperscript{100}

Slave 3 acts shamefully in the sense of pudor-script 5 insomuch as he fails to exert himself and behaves as a coward. And this is the case whether Slave 3 supports or opposes the king. If he supports him, Slave 1 and Slave 2 exemplify an available course of bold exertion; if he opposes him, the citizens show the way. Indeed, first-century audiences may have registered the king’s order to gather and slaughter his enemies first and foremost as augmenting the cowardice of Slave 3: not only does Slave 3 do nothing; he does nothing while others act boldly and will die for it. An audience guided by a sense of shame calibrated to script 5 envies the citizens their fate rather than Slave 3 his, since execution following bravery is preferable to living in impotence born of cowardice. In the execution of the enemies, Slave 3 is disgraced.\textsuperscript{101}

Within script 5 there is additionally “the pudor felt by those who display an unbecoming dependency in accepting gestures of ‘mercy’ (clementia) or ‘indulgence’ (venia).”\textsuperscript{102} Slave 3 acts shamefully in this sense insomuch as his profession of fear is an attempt to preempt anger and elicit indulgence from the king.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 47.

\textsuperscript{101} The text is thus more cohesive than is sometimes thought. Snodgrass claims (\textit{Stories with Intent}, 536), “The throne claimant elements shift the focus of the parable and weave a second plot that causes some loss. No mention is made of the punishment of Luke’s third servant, a feature lost in the announcement of punishment on the rebellious citizens.” To the contrary, the order to slaughter the enemies makes more conspicuous the cowardice of Slave 3, rendering his conduct even more shameful.

\textsuperscript{102} Kaster, \textit{Emotion}, 47.
The sixth *pudor*-script concerns “discreditable ‘lowering’ of the self,” which “comprises any behavior, or any state produced by my own behavior, that is regarded as merely humiliating in itself.”\(^\text{103}\) One event that triggers this *pudor*-script is “when I prove to be stupid if I fancy myself shrewd (Cic. *Dom.* 29).”\(^\text{104}\) That Slave 3 acts shamefully in this sense is made apparent by the king’s reply (19:22-23): the king calls Slave 3 wicked and, judging Slave 3 in his own words, reveals his stupidity. The further shame is that Slave 3 is dispossessed and made an example of. First-century audiences will have registered Slave 3’s conduct as shameful because they will themselves have had a “sense of shame.” To have a “sense of shame” means to be predisposed to the risk of experiencing “occurrent” shame:

Scripts 4-6 embrace potentially *pudor*-inducing behaviors of myriad sorts, and their very range appears to justify the metaphor of the “high-wire act” that has been used to express the risk of social disaster that animated the emotion: one slip—and there were slips of so many different kinds—and down you went, to disgrace and the discomfort of occurrent shame. Yet, at the same time, the analysis implies that thoroughly well-socialized persons—whose “sense of shame” guarded against discreditable “extension,” “retraction,” and “lowering” of the self all at once—were also supported by scripts that had come to constitute a “second nature”: like a gyroscope, the dispositional form of the emotion helped them to maintain equilibrium, buoying them up to prevent their “lowering” and holding them in line, to avoid the pitch and yaw of erratic “extension” and “retraction.”\(^\text{105}\)

DS is illuminated further by Kaster’s study of *verecundia* (worried regard, respect). Like *pudor*, *verecundia* has both an occurrent and a dispositional form:

When I report that I am experiencing *verecundia* in its occurrent form, I mean to convey that I am experiencing a fully embodied worry about mishandling (in particular ways) a specific interpersonal transaction already in progress, a form of

\(^\text{103}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{104}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{105}\) Ibid., 47-48.
fearful self-consciousness that at least in some instances approximates our being and feeling flustered or embarrassed. By contrast, if I say that I am dispositionally a verecundus person (though, being such, I probably would never say that), I mean that I tend as a general matter to be wary about mishandling (in particular ways) interpersonal transactions whenever they might occur: my self-description conveys that I am the sort of person much inclined to experience the occurrent form of verecundia and am habitually sensitive to contexts that arouse it.106

Kaster describes verecundia itself thus:

verecundia animates the art of knowing your proper place in every social transaction and basing your behavior on that knowledge; by guiding behavior in this way, verecundia establishes or affirms the social bond between you and others, all of whom (ideally) play complementary roles. Most fully, this means that you will each gauge your standing relative to the others; you will each present yourself in a way that at least will not give offense—for example, by confrontation or importunity—and that preferably will signal your full awareness of the others’ face, the character they wear in the transaction and the respect that that character is due; and you will stop short of overtly pressing your full claims, yet not be excessively self-effacing—not obliterate your own face, the character you are wearing and the respect that it is due. This is the script, the sequence of interlocking motives and moves, that someone experiencing verecundia—a verecundus person—enacts; by enacting that script, the verecundus person draws a line for the self to observe, in settings where no such line is drawn by formal or external authority, where he or she must improvise a performance as a well-socialized person.107

Hence the “simplest social product of verecundia is what might be called ‘ignorability’: not being invisible, quite, but being seen to claim the minimum amount of social space needed to carry out a given line of action”; one way to display verecundia is “in not blowing your own horn.”108

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106 Ibid., 16.

107 Ibid., 15. It bears acknowledging, given the subject matter of DS, that “No slave is ever described as experiencing verecundia, presumably because slaves—at least according to the ideology of Roman slavery—have no autonomous volition, hence no actual self, hence no face to maintain or lose: there is, accordingly, no need for an emotion to draw a line that the nonexistent self ought not cross” (ibid., 23).

108 Ibid., 17, 18.
Slave 3 is not a *verecundus* person. Slave 1 and Slave 2 are foils. They do “claim the minimum amount of social space needed to carry out a given line of action.” Their reports are succinct, graceful. They are perfectly “ignorable.” Slave 3 is anything but: he says more than necessary; talks about himself; and risks offending the king by volunteering his estimation of him. Slave 3 may even be boasting, his explanation an attempt to show the prudence of his behavior. Moreover, Slave 3 fails to understand the other party’s perspective. He reckons a mina a lot to risk; to the king it is a very small thing. Slave 3 reckons it important to explain his conduct; the king would likely have preferred brevity.

Finally, *fastidium* (revulsion). Kaster distinguishes between reflexive and deliberative *fastidium*-reactions:

[T]wo kinds of processes, two basic scripts, are needed to account for the production and representation of *fastidium*. One of these scripts can for the sake of convenience be labeled a “per se reflex” (“absolute and automatic” would do as well). This is the *fastidium*-reaction that sick people have to food: it is not this kind (quality, quantity) of food as opposed to that kind (quality, quantity) for which they feel an aversion but food per se, and the aversion seems to arise automatically, as something independent of will and choice—it is simply there, willy-nilly and “naturally.” But it is also the *fastidium*-reaction that, for example, the elder Pliny registers in response to bedbugs (*HN* 29.61) or to the thought of eating a green lizard for medicinal purposes (*HN* 30.90): it is not this bedbug (lizard) as opposed to that bedbug (lizard) that causes the reaction; it is bedbugs (lizards) as such, and Pliny makes it quite clear that the response does not proceed from any sort of conscious deliberation—it is visceral and seemingly reflexive, it is just the way these things make him feel (*BAD*). And it is also quite clear that this reaction occurs (to the Roman mind) in response not only to things but to people or situations, too, including ethical situations….

On the other hand, there is a pattern of engagement that might be labeled “deliberative and ranking.” This is the *fastidium*-reaction that people experience when they have considered at some level of consciousness the relative value or status of two or more things (or people)—including, very often, their own value.

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109 So Dodd: “It is implied that [Slave 3] expected to be commended for his caution and strict honesty” (*Parables of the Kingdom*, 111).
or status relative to some thing (or person)—and have decided to rank one of those things (or people) so low as to have an aversion to it (or him). This is the *fastidium* that a connoisseur might feel toward this example of poetry (music, food) as opposed to that.\textsuperscript{110}

Reflexive *fastidium*—automatic, visceral aversion—may be caused “by things or acts that are ethnically noisome, that in fact amount to ‘taboos’:"

Cannibalism, defecation, and incest are all subject to “big” taboos, matters of intense and deep-seated aversion in most human cultures: it is not surprising to see them appear among the Roman responses of per se *fastidium*. But we do, perhaps, learn a bit more about the specifically Roman character of this response when we find their company shared by cowardice, or by another taboo deeply rooted in Roman social and political culture: the taboo against boasting.\textsuperscript{111}

To Roman sensibilities, cowardice and boasting are not merely distasteful but abhorrent. Each triggers revulsion automatically and immediately. Whereas modern readers of DS tend to be disgusted by the talk of slaughter, those of a “Roman mind” will have experienced disgust *in response to Slave 3*. In the short span of the parable, Slave 3 manages to be a bumbler, a boaster, a groveler, and a do-nothing coward—all in contrast to the other characters.

In short, Slave 3 will have prompted reflexive disgust, will have registered *viscerally* as a disgrace. The question arises: *To what end?*

5.2 The Rhetorical Program of DS

Luke 19:11 describes the occasion for DS: \(\text{Ἀκουόντων δὲ αὐτῶν ταῦτα προσθεῖς εἶπεν παραβολὴν διὰ τὸ ἐγγὺς εἶναι Ἰερουσαλήμ αὐτὸν καὶ δοκεῖν αὐτοὺς ὅτι παραχρῆμα μέλλει ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ ἀναφαίνεσθαι.} \) *pararchēma* occurs nine other times in Luke. In seven cases it pertains to the instant recovery brought about by Jesus’s word and/or

\textsuperscript{110} Kaster, *Emotion*, 104-5.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 110-12.
touch: Simon’s mother-in-law *immediately* stands and serves after Jesus rebukes her fever (4:39); a paralytic *immediately* stands, picks up what he was lying on, and goes home praising God at Jesus’s word (5:25); a woman’s bleeding *immediately* stops when she touches the edge of Jesus’s cloak (8:44, 47); a seemingly dead child *immediately* stands up at Jesus’s touch and word (8:55); a crippled, bent-over woman *immediately* stands straight at Jesus’s touch and word (13:13); a blind man *immediately* sees and follows Jesus, glorifying God, at Jesus’s word (18:43). In one case παραχρῆμα relates to an instantaneous recovery not involving Jesus: when Zechariah confirms that his son is to be named John, Zechariah’s mouth is opened, his tongue is freed, and he praises God *immediately* (1:64). One instance has nothing to do with recovery: a cock crows *immediately* as Peter is denying his association with Jesus (22:60). The cock crowing excepted, παραχρῆμα appears in accounts of healing in Luke, especially at Jesus’s word and/or touch: recovery comes about *immediately*.

It is with DS that Jesus responds to those harboring the expectation that he is about to make the kingdom of God appear *immediately*, i.e., in the fashion of a healing—as though Jerusalem’s ills will fall away and the kingdom of God will suddenly be the moment Jesus touches the city. This expectation is wrong. Worse still is its pernicious corollary: *I don’t have to do anything for God’s reign to appear!* The expectation is convenient, self-serving, and false: it allows one to enjoy the fervor of “supporting” Jesus while excusing one from action.

Slave 3—the boastful, do-nothing coward—is a fitting caricature. From both the audience and Slave 3 decisive action is called for. Even to act against Jesus, if out of some sincere concern, would be more honorable than being a self-satisfied bystander.
The parable is a trap and a warning: the audience is to be revolted by Slave 3 and then left to realize *I am that man*; and, *Unless I change course, I will live as a disgrace*.

DS has nothing to do with Jesus going away and coming back. It is every bit as applicable during the earthly life of Jesus as it is after that life, and even before it. DS is not about testing and future judgement; it is an expression of judgment *right now* upon a superficially exuberant crowd. The rhetorical point is clear: *If you honestly desire that the reign of God appear, then do God’s will—faithfully, boldly, shrewdly.*

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112 The rhetorical significance of DS is lost as soon as the nobleman is identified with Jesus/God. In the history of interpretation several things have led to this identification: aspects of the Lukan context; apparent consistency with The Talents (wherein the allegory is unmistakable); and the propensity among early Christians to allegorize. By the time readers began to challenge allegorical readings, world sensitivities had shifted enough to complicate recovery of the parable’s original rhetoric.

113 It is of course conceivable that the historical, flesh-and-blood Jesus employed DS in this way. Regarding Luke, an even stronger case may be made. Zacchaeus models bold action in the pericope preceding DS (Luke 19:1-10): Zacchaeus actively pursues his goal and ultimately commits to undoing his unjust works and giving charitably.

The two aphorisms spoken by the nobleman in DS (19:17, 26) link the parable to places where Jesus speaks similarly: 19:17 corresponding to 16:10; 19:26 to 8:18. The aphorism about *being faithful with very little* connects DS with The Dishonest Steward (16:1-8): the steward acts boldly in pursuit of his goal.

The aphorism concerning *more being given to the one who has* ties DS to Luke’s parable of The Sower and Jesus’s explanation (8:4-15) as well as to the pericope concerning the arrival of Jesus’s family (8:19-21). In both, committed action is emphasized. As Anderson aptly observes (“Lukan Kingship Parable,” 122-23, emphasis original):

Luke’s redaction of the final clause of the interpretation (8:15; // Mark 4:20) suggests that the efficaciousness of the word is anything but automatic, much less miraculous, but rather dependent upon hearers of good will and perseverance almost “against all odds.” The word’s success is dependent on the active “taking hold” (*κατέχουσιν*, cf. Mark 4:20, *παραδέχονται*) of it by those of an “honest and good heart” and that with “perseverance” (both expressions peculiar to Luke)….

Finally, it should be noted that Luke has the parable being told to a great crowd…. For Luke, crowds are not only indicative of Jesus’ great popularity among the people, but also cause for suspicion of superficiality. The presence elsewhere of similarly enthusiastic “great crowds” occasions rejoinders to “repent” and “count the cost” for the purpose of sifting the multitudes (e.g., 3:7-
5.3 DS as a Rhetorical-Aesthetic Counterpart

Experience of the rhetoric of DS will have a central place in any well-developed envisionment. Yet there is more to the parable if it is to be not merely a rhetorical instrument but rather a rhetorical-aesthetic counterpart. Rather than identify DS entirely with its rhetoric, I propose the following: the rhetorical program I have sketched is the most prominent aspect of a more expansive intent to occasion the development of the audience’s disposition toward DS-like phenomena and to serve as a locus of community. Related to the central rhetorical point are additional profundities which a reader may or may not realize in herself through successive firsthand transactions governed by graduating envisionment standards, i.e., aesthetic reading (Ch. 4:1). It seems to me that these profundities have to do with three topics:

1. the formidability of corrupt social systems and nevertheless the ever-present possibility of change;

2. the tragedy consequent upon a fantasy-warped (in)action and the ever-present possibility of learning better to pursue more noble goals;

3. the regularity and indeed the ease of perpetrating atrocity, and the rarity and difficulty of enacting God’s will.

While these topics may be stated easily enough, it is through aesthetic reading that an individual develops both her envisionment of DS and her person, that is, she comes to develop...

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14 [John the Baptist]; 6:17-49; 11:29-32; 14:25-33). In light of this Lukan pattern and the distinctive redaction already noted above, it may be that the parable is to be read in Luke’s gospel not only as an apologia and paradigm, but also as a summons to resolute faith. The parable is not only an explanation of the word’s sometimes failure but a call to be counted among those of an “honest and good heart” who, “hearing, take possession of the word and bear fruit with perseverance.”

The pericope about the arrival of Jesus’s family concludes with a call to action. Jesus says (8:21): μὴτηρ μου καὶ ἀδελφοί μου οὕτω εἰσίν οἱ τὸν λόγον τοῦ θεοῦ ἀκούοντες καὶ ποιοῦντες.
a more mature disposition regarding the phenomena indicated by the subject matter. Additionally, it is by way of aesthetic reading that a reader uniquely experiences DS as the personal expression of the author, for example, as the personal lamentation of Jesus—*People destroy one another for trifles but balk before God’s will*—and so experiences communion. Thus, in identifying DS as a rhetorical-aesthetic counterpart, I am proposing that the author intends the parable to serve as a locus of community and to occasion the development of the reader’s disposition toward real-world DS-like situations, *first and foremost, instances wherein cowardice, smugness, misunderstanding, and complacency prevent the doing of God’s will.*

6. Conclusion

If it were not for this parable, I would still be mostly ignorant about atrocity, atrocities in the past as well as those nearer my time and place. I would still be oblivious to my own insensitivity to those who have suffered, and those suffering. Not far, maybe, but I have come some way. And the catalyst for this is the parable. As audiences before me, perhaps, I am beginning to see that *I am that man,* the do-nothing Slave 3. To be sure, neither Jesus nor Luke anticipated in any specific way the encounters I have had with the parable. But if my proposal is correct, that is, if DS is a rhetorical-aesthetic counterpart, then the experiences I have been afforded are *among those,* are *of the sort,* that the author will have desired. It is my hope that this study will equip other readers to experience the rhetoric of DS and to hear and reflect on the parable in an aesthetic mode.
Table 6: The Best Candidate Aesthetic-Counterparts in Luke

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parable</th>
<th>Number of Words</th>
<th>Number of Actors</th>
<th>Number of Settings Populated by Multiple Actors</th>
<th>Concerning the Distribution of Speech</th>
<th>Shifts in Fictional Mode</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>An “actor” is any personal agent who is the subject of a finite verb</td>
<td>Proportion of Direct Discourse</td>
<td>Number of Speakers (Including Narrator)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Treasured Son 15:11b-32</td>
<td>391</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50% 194/391</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disgraced Slave 19:12b-27</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>64% 161/253</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rich Man &amp; Lazarus 16:19-31</td>
<td>253</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55% 138/253</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feast 14:16b-24</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>57% 90/159</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steward 16:1b-8a</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>55% 78/143</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Halfdead Man 10:30b-35</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>13% 14/106</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vineyard 20:9b-15a</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>22% 22/101</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fool 12:16b-20</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>77% 61/79</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fig Tree 13:6b-9</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>65% 51/78</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pharisee &amp; Publican 18:10-13</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>46% 35/76</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judge 18:2b-5</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>47% 33/70</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study has been to test the following proposition: *If a parable is a counterpart to the person reading it, then a more critical and comprehensive vision of reading will lead to a more complete vision of parable.* I summarize here my procedure and results:

A brief Introduction indicates that commentators often presuppose the importance of firsthand encounter with parables and raises the question as to why reading parables for oneself might be important.

In Chapter 1, I argue that modern studies of parables appeal to reception activity but commonly lack a critical and comprehensive vision of it.

In Chapter 2, I turn to domains that develop critical conceptions of reception activity, and derive from these a relatively comprehensive account: an Envisionment-Development Model of Reading (EDMR).

I next consider particular parables in light of EDMR:

In Chapter 3, I argue that The Prodigal Son is intended for aesthetic reception. This thesis derives from my identification of five places in the text that lend themselves to mutually exclusive, story-defining inferences. This indeterminacy suggests that The Prodigal Son is not intended to communicate or do one certain, definite thing, whether rhetorically, metaphorically, or allegorically.

In Chapter 4, I therefore argue that the purpose of The Prodigal Son, as an aesthetic counterpart, is *to occasion the development of the reader’s disposition toward Prodigal Son-like phenomena and to serve as a locus of community*. I employ EDMR to define an aesthetic reading mode, and present four fictional vignettes to demonstrate
aesthetic reading in practice. I conclude that if The Prodigal Son is an aesthetic counterpart, then it is plausible that other parables are, too.

In Chapter 5, I turn to the next best candidate for aesthetic reception, The Minas. Drawing on EDMR and my own experience reading the parable in an aesthetic mode, I find that the parable—which I take to be a depiction of emergent collective evildoing—has a definite rhetorical purpose but nevertheless invites aesthetic reception. Especially important in this discussion are extratextual sources that enable readers to ponder and evaluate the material enactment of the king’s final order.

I hope that this study gives my reader a sense of what can be done and how much more there is to do. If the agenda I have set out is found to be productive by future investigators, then there are several lines of inquiry to pursue, including the following:

1. How our understanding of the many received modes of reception might be refined, brought in line with readers’ actual experience, in light of EDMR.

2. How an understanding of aesthetic reception can vivify, or indeed revivify, our reception of other parables.

3. How custodians of parables—whether preachers in the pulpit or educators in the classroom—can lead others in aesthetic reception and empower them, individually and communally, to take the text in hand and read.

Perhaps, so empowered to envision parables readers and hearers will once again be moved to compassion.


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